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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1966 Vol. 19, No. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

KICK OF DEATH

by BRETT HALLIDAY

It was a deadly masquerade they played, the kid who wanted kicks and the ex-con who was his double. Somehow Mike Shayne must crack the grim riddle of the dead boy—who still went to school.

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

KICK OF DEATH

Somewhere in the Miami night a mixed-up kid lay dead And somewhere Mike Shayne must track down and destroy the killer of a boy—who still went daily to school!

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MIKE SHAYNE eased himself into his chair with a sigh of contentment. His lunch had been good, the second sidecar had made him feel at peace with the world. He felt so relaxed in fact, that he eyed the message Lucy Hamilton had left on his desk with a certain distaste. He had no desire to work.

He sighed. There was no rest in this world. If he did not return the call of Mr. Roderick Edgeworth, Lucy would be buzzing any minute. His pert secretary did not like inefficiency. He sighed again, and reached for the telephone.

His intercom buzzed once, then twice.

"Michael?" Lucy Hamilton's voice said. "Mr. Roderick Edgeworth on two."

There was a strong note of disapproval in her voice. She considered it a reflection on the professionalism of *her* office to have a man call back after he had left a message to be called. Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin.

He pressed button two. "Shayne, speaking."

The voice on the other end of the line was crisp and clipped.

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"Roderick Edgeworth, Mr. Shayne. I asked you to call me?"

"I got the message, Mr. Edgeworth," Shayne said drily.

The voice was impatient, almost angry. It was the voice of a man accustomed to getting what he wanted precisely when he wanted it. "In that case, may I ask why—"

Shayne cut in harshly. "I'm a busy man, Mr. Edgeworth. Let's get to the point."

There was a deadly silence at the other end of the line. In his sunny office Shayne grinned. He guessed that he had anticipated Roderick Edgeworth's next line, as he had intended to do. The impatient man, taken aback for a moment, was silent. Then there was a long, slow exhaling breath at the other end of the telephone line.

"All right, Shayne. Perhaps I am no busier than you. I will get to the point. I need a good man to represent me. I want the best. Therefore I called you. Are you available?"

"What's the job?" Shayne asked.

"Like you, Shayne. I'm a busy man. I have no time to explain the matter unless I know you are available. If you are not, tell me and I can contact someone else."

"I never take a job without knowing what it is."

"I don't expect you to. It's a simple enough job, routine for you I expect. If you are available, I'll explain the job in my office. I'll pay your full fee for three days in advance, plus expenses, of course."

"Come to my office and tell me about it," Shayne said.

There was a pause. "Mr. Shayne, if I had the time to come to your office I would have the time to do the job myself."

"Unless—" Shayne began. He was becoming irritated by the arrogant Mr. Roderick Edgeworth.

"My son appears to be missing, Mr. Shayne," Edgeworth said from the other end of the line.

Shayne took a breath. "Kidnaping? Then you should call the police, not—"

"I doubt it very much," Edgeworth broke in. The impatient man was not, apparently, accustomed to letting people finish sentences. "Thayer is rather a wild boy. He has run off before this. However, I do want him found."

Shayne sighed and silently bid his quiet afternoon good-by.

"Give me your address. I'll be right over."

The red-head took the address, hung up, clapped his panama on his shock of unruly red hair and left the office. He left Lucy still annoyed by having a client have to call twice for no good reason. The pert brown-eyed girl was busy over her typewriter, and barely acknowledged his farewell, which included where he could be reached.

The office of Roderick Edgeworth turned out to be in an elegant new office building in a business complex on the edge of Miami. Shayne rode up in a silent elevator,

and was ushered into a private office by a breathtaking blonde.

In his own way, Roderick Edgeworth was just as equally breathtaking.

"Sit down, Shayne. I can tell you the particulars in ten minutes. I assume you are ready to work at once?"

Roderick Edgeworth, President, did not wait for an answer. He was a tall, muscular man, with only a faint trace of grey in his immaculate black hair. Shayne estimated that Edgeworth was barely forty-five, and looked younger. The man was clearly dynamic, busy, a powerhouse of business activity. He swivelled rapidly back and forth in the chair behind his enormous desk all the time he spoke.

"My son Thayer is sixteen. He's a wild kid, believe me. He's kept two governesses, a chauffeur, and two private male secretaries more than busy. That was why I decided that this year he was going off to St. Edmunds. Now they tell me he's gone, walked out! Damn kid!"

Shayne waited in his chair. The man stopped talking and looked at him. Shayne lighted a cigarette and stretched out his long legs.

"Let's start slow, okay?" Shayne said drily. "First, what is St. Edmunds?"

"St. Edmunds Academy. It's upstate near Jacksonville. Actually, it's situated a long way from nowhere, which is one reason I picked it. The nearest town is Marimba Beach, which is probably the mistake I made."

"Mistake?" Shayne asked.

Edgeworth nodded. "We used to vacation in Marimba Beach sometimes. Thayer knows people there. I didn't think. Actually, St. Edmunds is a semi-military school. It's at least twenty miles from Marimba Beach, and students are not allowed cars, so I just assumed Thayer would be safely locked up."

"You make it sound like a prison."

"In a way it is. It's a small place, very private and very expensive. Every kid is a blue-blood, a nutty blue-blood. They're all wild kids, I suppose—too old to be kept home and too young to be shipped off to college. Thayer is going to England to school next year, but I had this year to get past. I blame myself for forgetting Marimba Beach. That's where he is, I'm sure, and that's where I want you to find him."

"Does he have a mother?"

"My wife is my ex-wife. She lives in France," Edgeworth said. "I have two older boys, both okay and in college up north."

Shayne nodded. "All right. Now tell me the immediate details."

Edgeworth reached into his desk and handed Shayne a small picture. Shayne looked at it and saw a tall, thin, handsome boy with dark hair and a pleasant smile. The boy's nose was slightly crooked.

"He broke the nose two years ago in a riot up in New York,"

Edgeworth said. "As I said, he's wild."

"Any particular girl?"

Edgeworth laughed. "Thayer? Hell no. He chases them all. No, he hasn't run off with a girl. And I doubt if he's in any kind of trouble. He's smart enough. My guess is it's just another wild prank. He's pulled dozens, including running away about seven times, and mixing with every bum out of jail."

"All right. Start with when he went to St. Edmunds. Is this his first time there?"

"Yes. No school ever took him twice. He went up there just about two weeks ago. Flew to Jacksonville; the school picked him up there. As I said, they do not allow cars. Major Granger, he's the headmaster, wired that Thayer had arrived safely. I received my regular letter, usually asking for money, every two days. I have always insisted on that, keeps me in touch. I like the boy to know I'm interested in him."

"That's nice of you," Shayne said drily.

Edgeworth glared but went on. "Anyway, I received my letter every two days until four days ago. No letter. It's happened before. But two days ago still no letter. Then today I got a call from Major Granger. Thayer has been missing two days. I told Major Granger what I thought of him. He said he was sure the boy would return. When he didn't, Granger called me. He wants me to come up there. Naturally, I can't do that just at the drop of a hat. So, that's where you come in."

"Of course," Shayne said. "How were the boy's letters? Moody? Despondent? Any hints?"

"None. You can look at them yourself."

Edgeworth tossed a thin packet of letters. They were dated every two days. They said essentially nothing. They were all postmarked Marimba Beach. Shayne read them carefully. They were not moody or despondent. If anything, they seemed almost excited, happy and jubilant.

Shayne handed them back. "His writing?"

"Of course," Edgeworth said.

"And you want me to go up and find him? Won't he come home by himself?"

"Of course he will, as soon as the cash runs out. But I don't want that. I want him brought home. I have no intention of letting him think he can pull this kind of stunt. It's just a prank to get my attention, probably. He's done it before."

"I wonder why?" Shayne said drily.

"Spare me the Freud, Shayne. Will you handle the job?"

"Somebody has to worry about him," Shayne said.

"Good. My secretary will give you a check."

And suddenly the man changed, his face worried. "There is one

thing, Shayne. In one of those letters—the third I think—he spoke of meeting real men. You see it?"

Shayne saw it.

"That's a reference to something," Edgeworth said, and the businessman stood at his window. "He got mixed up with some crooks a year or so ago. He called them at least real men. I'm worried about that." Edgeworth turned and looked at Shayne. "He also tried to kill himself once years ago. I want him back, Shayne—alive."

"You should go yourself," Shayne said.

"I can't," Edgeworth said, and turned again to the window. "I'm very busy now, but it's not just that. Whatever I could do for my son I should have done years ago. I know that now. Now it's too late. Thayer hates hypocrites. I'm even afraid that if he is in some trouble he might hurt himself before he lets me find him."

Shayne nodded slowly. Edgeworth really loved his son. As he left he thought how the love should have been shown earlier.

II

IT WAS A GREY day with a threat of rain as Mike Shayne drove the narrow highway from Marimba Beach inland toward St. Edmunds Academy. The road wound treacherously through swampy land with many small, sluggish streams. Some five miles before he reached the

academy, the road came out of the coastal tideland into an inland grassland of small hills, grass and scrub trees.

There were few side roads, and only two other paved highways between Marimba Beach and the academy, and Shayne met little traffic. The land seemed mostly dull and hilly wasteland, with occasional truck farms and a few feeble citrus groves that were not doing well this far north in Florida. Just before he reached the academy it began to rain.

He drove over a rise in the road and saw St. Edmunds. It was a series of low, two-story frame buildings set on a hill around a thick, four-story grey stone building. A scrub pine forest bordered the academy on three sides. The fourth side was open, with a road leading up through the rain to a gate in a

high iron fence. Shayne drove to the gate and blew his horn.

A uniformed guard came out and leaned into the car.

"Shayne to see Major Granger."

The guard went away to make a call. He came back moments later and waved Shayne on. The tall iron gates opened as if by well-oiled magic. There was considerable of the prison about St. Edmund's Academy after all. It was a short drive to the front entrance of the grey stone four-story building. A slim, dark-haired girl waited on the steps.

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Yes," he said.

"Major Granger is waiting in his office," the girl said, and her eyes seemed to search his car.

"I came alone, Miss—"

"Capstan," the girl said. "I'm the major's secretary. I know the major wanted to see Mr. Edgeworth."

"Didn't Edgeworth explain that I would be coming alone, Miss Capstan?"

By the time Shayne said this they had reached the office and walked in. Shayne, talking, had noted the dim but wide entrance corridor of the grey stone building, the general gloom of the place in the rain. Now, as he walked into the almost bare office, a small, compact man in military uniform answered the question he had asked Miss Capstan.

"He did, Mr. Shayne, but I expect I was hoping he would change his mind," Major Granger said. "Come in. No calls, and don't disturb us unless it is about the Edgeworth boy, Miss Capstan."

The private office of the headmaster was as austere as the outer office. There was a bare wooden desk, a long wooden bench with a slatted back, two wooden chairs, an American flag, a wooden swivel chair behind the desk, and on the wall two crossed officers swords. There were also two framed diplomas and a framed private school license. The small, sturdy major waved Shayne to a seat in one of the wooden chairs. The stocky headmaster sat behind his desk and toyed with a small Malayan dagger he obviously used as a letter opener.

"Edgeworth must be a cold man," the major said without preamble.

"Busy and confused, I'd say," Shayne said. "He feels he's lost the boy's love, and doesn't know how to get it back."

"He won't get it by sending a private detective to look for Thayer," Granger said bluntly.

"He thinks the boy may be off on some escapade with bad characters, and wouldn't take to a show of parental concern at this late date," Shayne explained.

Major Granger grunted and swivelled silently in his chair for a few moments. Then the stocky ex-soldier took a pipe from his desk

and lighted it slowly, carefully. Shayne watched him. The major seemed disturbed about more than a sixteen-year-old boy off on a prank.

"He may be right," Granger said simply. "The boy was a strange one, and I know strange boys. This school, in case you hadn't heard or observed, Shayne, is where they send high-strung or just plain rotten kids they can't handle. Mostly it's the parents who are rotten, believe me."

The compact little major puffed and looked idly up at the swords on his wall. "I like my boys. I don't like the parents much. It's the same as the army, Shayne. There is no such thing as a bad unit in an army, only bad leaders. I believe that, and I know and can handle boys because I like them. But this Thayer—"

Shayne waited. The major seemed to be thinking of a lot of things. Finally Shayne decided to get Granger started again by asking a question.

"You don't interview the boys in advance?"

Granger snorted. "No. We know they are problem cases or we wouldn't get them. We have a look at their records, and after that we keep an open mind. As far as I'm concerned, when a boy comes here the same rules apply that applied in my commands. I don't care what a man's background is; I don't even ask. All I want from him is to measure up while he is here. I may say that I have here, as I had in the service, a reputation for hard but fair discipline. Men respond to that, and so do boys."

"But Thayer?" Shayne asked quietly.

Granger puffed on his pipe, swivelled. "Thayer Edgeworth was the exception. He surprised me. I couldn't get through to him. Oh, nothing tangible. He did more or less what he was told. In fact, that was one of the peculiar things. He was too mild, you understand? His record indicated he was a wild, high-strung boy, given to rebelliousness. Here he gave us very little trouble at all. He was quiet, withdrawn, did what he was told, and yet—"

The major hesitated, puffed clouds of smoke. "I don't like to be wrong about a boy, but Thayer Edgeworth fooled me. He kept to himself, joined in nothing, not even the usual protests I always expect in the first few weeks from the new boys. You know, too much ordering around, too much dirty work, the food is bad, no fun, etc. Just like recruits.

"Thayer was moody, very withdrawn, yet there was something very menacing about him. He seemed to be sneering at us, biding his time. Almost as if he knew how to get along here; he did, but wasn't actually with us. He seemed, well, cunning. That is something our boys usually aren't. A shrewd

type, a barracks lawyer. Always watching."

The major stopped, and Shayne watched him. He was putting the picture of Thayer Edgeworth given by his father, against that given by the major.

A pattern came out.

"It sounds like someone planning something," Shayne said slowly. "Biding his time."

Granger nodded. "That is my thought exactly. And I kick myself that I missed it. A man ready to go over the hill acts the same way. I should have seen it. But there were other things, and I let them distract me. Thayer did not seem the type. I mean, Shayne, he wasn't like the other boys. He was poor in class, for example. Our boys tend to be excessively bright. Thayer wasn't. Our boys like sports. Thayer didn't. He didn't *walk* right."

"Walk?" Shayne said.

"He slouched. It was as if he were acting, trying to play a tough-guy role. That was probably what he was doing. You see, I wanted Edgeworth here for a specific reason." The major eyed Shayne carefully. Then the stocky ex-soldier shrugged. "I suppose I better tell you. Edgeworth said you had full authority to act for him."

"Tell me?" Shayne asked, tugging slowly on his left earlobe.

Granger nodded. "Yes, tell you. You see, Shayne, the boy did not just disappear—he stole money from the safe!"

Shayne sat up. "Money? How much?"

"No, not much, but he stole. About three hundred dollars I had on hand. He broke into my office that night. One of our teachers, Captain Maple, saw him coming out and tried to stop him. The boy knocked him out with a piece of pipe. By the time Maple recovered, Thayer was gone. He must have had a car, or a ride of some kind, waiting beyond the fence."

"How did he get over the fence?"

"I don't know. It isn't easy. I tell you," Granger said.

"You think he had help, some confederates waiting outside?"

"What else can I think? He acted as if he were waiting for something, biding his time. He steals money. He attacks one of my teachers with a prepared weapon. He gets over a fence. He vanishes when the nearest town is over twenty miles away. He had to have help, and have it planned."

Granger puffed angrily on his pipe. "That was why I wanted Edgeworth here. I'll have to report this to the police very soon. But I have my school to think about, and I like my boys. I want to give Thayer every chance to come back. I want Edgeworth to have every chance of getting to the boy before he is picked up with some gang of criminals! But I can't wait much longer. After all, he did attack one of my men."

Shayne became aware of some-

one behind him. He turned just as Major Granger saw the newcomer, frowned, then waved the person in.

"It wasn't quite like that," the newcomer said. "I mean, I had my gun out, you know, I thought it was a prowler. I think he was very scared."

The man raised his eyebrows as he looked at Mike Shayne. Shayne stared in return.

III

WHAT SHAYNE saw was a powerful, tall giant of a man. The man was at least six feet four inches tall, weighed an easy two hundred and forty pounds, probably more. Shayne watched him walk forward as lightly as a cat. A trained athlete, Shayne judged. Not a man even Shayne would like to tangle with willingly.

Major Granger introduced them. "Larry, this is Mike Shayne, a private investigator Edgeworth sent up instead of coming himself. It seems he is busy," and Granger shrugged. "Shayne, this is our athletic and geography instructor, Captain Maple. We all double in brass here."

Shayne shook hands with the big man. Larry Maple seemed to be judging him exactly as he was judging Maple. The giant captain had a grip of steel. Shayne matched it. He grinned at Maple, but he could see by Maple's eyes that the big captain thought he could take Shayne. Shayne thought otherwise, but he had no intention of proving it.

"You're a big man, Captain," Shayne said. "And trained, if I judge right."

Maple nodded. "You mean how come I couldn't stop one sixteen-year-old kid? Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Shayne. I didn't know it was Thayer Edgeworth, or any of our boys. So when I saw this guy come out the window of the major's office, I drew my pistol. I guess he saw the gun, and simply outfoxed me. I mean, he got me from behind somehow. Even a sixteen-year-old kid wields a mean length of pipe."

"How come you were carrying a gun?" Shayne said. "I see you have it now."

Maple, like Major Granger, was dressed in full uniform. It was the major who explained.

"Those of us who hold commissions, Shayne, wear our uniforms. This is a semi-military school. The boys all wear uniforms on parade day, Saturday, and military instruction days—Mondays and Wednesdays."

Shayne nodded. "What else can you tell me about Thayer or the day he disappeared?"

Maple shrugged. "Very little. He seemed happy enough. None of them are very happy the first few weeks; they're spoiled kids mostly I was really caught short when he pulled that money stunt and flew the coop."

"You knew him well?" Shayne said.

"He was in my military section," Maple said.

Major Granger explained. "We divide the boys into military sections. There are three. We also divide them into barracks, and home classes. The three people who know a boy best are his military section leader, his barrack chief, and his home class instructor. In Thayer's case that would be Captain Maple here, Mr. Burley his barrack chief, and Mr. Escudo, his home class instructor."

"What about the day? I suppose you looked for him?"

Granger nodded. "Along the road both ways, and Maple and Burley went into Marimba Beach. No trace."

"Perhaps Mr. Shayne can do better," Captain Maple said. "He is a trained investigator."

Shayne grinned. "I expect I can. Now, how about talking to those other two you mentioned? Then I'd like to talk to some of his friends among the students. Boys don't often confide in their elders, but they do in their pals."

Maple shook his head. "I'm afraid Thayer had no pals."

"I'll send for Burley and Escudo," Major Granger said.

While they waited for the well-curved Miss Capstan to locate Burley and Escudo, Shayne studied the two men in the office. His practiced eye told him that Captain Maple was nervous. The ex-soldier seemed tense behind an elaborately calm exterior. Of course, this could simply be the worry of losing a boy—no trivial matter, Shayne guessed. Major Granger looked like a man who could be very hard. He would not be surprised if the major had said a few choice and not so pleasant words to Captain Maple. Perhaps Maple was worried about his job.

"How long have you been here, Captain Maple?" Shayne asked.

"Only a year, Shayne. I'm the new boy," Maple said.

Shayne nodded. That could explain the tenseness. He looked at Major Granger. The headmaster shot a hard glance at Maple. Yes, the major was a hard man, although Shayne liked the stocky little man. Tough but efficient and fair, that was how he judged Granger. He had no more time to consider before two men in plain civilian suits entered the office. Granger nodded to Shayne.

"Gentlemen, this is Mike Shayne, a private investigator sent by Thayer Edgeworth's father. It seems we have another very busy father. No wonder the boys run away!"

"This one was a sick boy anyway," the taller of the two new men said.

Granger said to Shayne. "This is Mr. Burley, Shayne. He was Thayer's barrack chief. I suppose he knew the boy best."

Burley shook his head. "No one knew that boy, Major. Not in two weeks. He was devious. The most devious I've ever met here, or else he had plans on his mind."

Shayne considered the tall, skinny Burley. The barrack chief had a way of not looking at you when he spoke, but he was the second to mention the impression that Thayer had plans. Shayne filed this in his mind, and turned to the other man.

"Mr. Enrique Ecudo," the major said.

The home-class teacher was a thin, elegant little man who gave the impression that he walked on his toes. He had the long, cadaverous face of a Spanish grandee, although the name made Shayne guess that he was not Spanish but Portuguese. Shayne was half right.

"Senor Escudo is our language and history teacher," Granger said. "A Brazilian by birth."

Escudo bowed like a bantam rooster. "My pleasure, Senor Shayne."

Shayne had the distinct impression that Senor Enrique Escudo peppered his speech with Portuguese phrases—but didn't have to. He sensed that the Brazilian spoke perfect English, but to be a volatile and linguistic Latin was his stock in trade. There was something very like a ramrod about the elegant little man. He reminded Shayne very much of a Latin version of Major Granger.

"You're a soldier, Mr. Escudo?"

Escudo smiled, bowed. "You are observant, Mr. Shayne. Yes, I have the honor to hold the rank of major in my country."

"How come you're here?" Shayne said bluntly.

Escudo showed no emotion, but Shayne caught a faint twitch of the eye muscles, and a slight cooling of manner. "My country does not make majors rich, Mr. Shayne. I enjoy to teach."

Major Granger added, "I met Enrique when he was up here on a military mission. When I started the school, I offered him a post. Now, if you have some questions, Shayne?"

The major looked at his watch. Shayne sensed that the headmaster did not like having his school routine disturbed. He faced the two newcomers.

They both appeared ready to answer.

"Only two questions, really, of both of you gentlemen," Shayne said. "What did you think of the boy, and do you know anything

that would give me a lead as to where he might be?"

Burley, the tall and skinny one, shook his head. "He was a close-mouthed kid, Shayne. Downright surly in the barrack. I don't think he spoke ten words to me the whole time he was here. No problems, you understand. He did what he was told. But he never opened up. I couldn't even guess what he had on his mind."

Shayne looked at the bantam Brazilian. Escudo rubbed his aristocratic chin. For the first time Shayne realized that the little Latin had a mustache—a tiny, pencil-thin blondish mustache barely noticeable.

"I found about the same. A silent boy, Mr. Shayne, very—how do you say it?—watchful. Yes, observant, wary, careful. He was not good in class. Our boys, they are wild, but they are very smart. This Thayer, he was not good in the classes."

Shayne nodded. "But did he give you any hint what he might have been planning?"

Escudo touched his mustache. "No, only that he showed very little interest in the class work except once—when I taught about South America, my own country. In that he showed much interest."

"In Brazil? He was interested?"

"Very interested," Escudo said.

Major Granger said, "You didn't tell me this, Enrique!"

Escudo shrugged. "I do not think of it. Now I think. Yes, he was much interested in Brazil."

Shayne nodded grimly. South America! It was just about what he would have expected. A moody, surly boy, much moodier than usual. Sent to a school that was almost a prison. Almost a man after years of being a boy. Acting strangely—changing, probably. Such a boy might be just the one to plan a run to the tropics. Almost all bright kids had heard that in Brazil you were safe from pursuit. A fallacy, but that was not as well known.

Shayne stood up.

"Okay. Now I'd like to talk to some of the boys."

Granger nodded. "Maple, take Shayne to see the boys in Thayer's unit and barrack."

"It won't help, believe me," Captain Maple said.

Burley agreed. "He made no friends, not even soulmates in discontent, which is usual around here at first."

Granger snapped them all short. "Suppose we let Mr. Shayne investigate; that's what he's here for. Now get to it, I've got other work."

The stocky major looked at Shayne. "I'll give you a day, Shayne, a little more. Then I've got to report the theft, at least. I've advised Edgeworth about his son; that part is between you and him, whether you call in the police or not. But I have to protect my other boys."

Shayne nodded and followed the other three men out, Captain Maple in the lead. He grinned at the curvaceous Miss Capstan as he passed. The girl almost jumped. She had been frowning, watching the men in front of Shayne, a definite look of worry on her pretty face.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. Romance? It was possible. Thayer Edgeworth was only sixteen, but a rich and mature sixteen. Miss Capstan couldn't be more than twenty-one. It had happened before.

IV

CAPTAIN MAPLE led Mike Shayne to one of the lower frame buildings. Up close these buildings were pleasant and comfortable, even in the thin rain. Inside there were two long corridors, one on each floor, with large rooms opening off each side of the central corridors. In each room there were four desks, two double bunk beds, two sofas and four easy chairs. There were four neat dressers, closets, and a wide expanse of window that would make the rooms light and airy on sunny days.

Maple took Shayne into the third room on the second floor. Three boys sat at the desks in the room. They rose to reluctant attention as Maple entered. They each looked at Shayne first with vague interest, then with the sudden wariness of youth. Maple introduced the three as Rogers, Lund, and De Beers. The oldest of the three, Rogers, appeared to be the leader. He glanced meaningfully at the other two as Maple finally told them who Shayne was.

"This is Mr. Shayne, boys, He's here to try to find out what happened to Thayer Edgeworth."

The boys said nothing.

"Anything you can tell me would help," Shayne said. He looked from one to the other.

"I don't see what we can tell," the oldest boy, Rogers, said.

"Why didn't his dad come himself?" the De Beers boy asked.

"Are you a cop?" young Lund said.

"Private," Shayne said. "Mr. Edgeworth was busy. He sent me to try to find Thayer."

The oldest boy, Rogers, sneered. "A shamus!"

Shayne studied them. They were all young, polite, fresh-faced boys, but there was a wariness about them. They were in conflict with something, all three of them, and in the room they had closed ranks against him. Rogers, the oldest, was the tallest and his smooth face showed the faint shadow of beard. De Beers was the youngest, a baby-faced boy with pimples and a sullen expression.

Lund was a rotund boy, still carrying his baby fat. Lund, too, pretended antagonism, but Shayne had a suspicion that Lund was actually fascinated by facing a real

"private eye." Shayne talked to the Lund boy.

"Fathers don't always act the way they should," Shayne said. "Is that why he ran off?"

"He never said much about his dad," young Lund said.

Rogers shot a quick glance at Lund. The oldest boy smiled at Shayne. "We don't talk much about family up here, Mr. Shayne. You know how it is—we're so busy learning and all."

The Rogers boy smiled that juvenile smile which teenagers have when they are sure they are outfoxing adults. A smile so obviously fake it would not fool a third-grade moron. Meant to be insincere, because teenagers who are outfoxing adults have to know that the adult knows he is being outfoxed or there isn't any fun. As a result, of course, the adult is not outfoxed.

"I know," Shayne said seriously, looking at Rogers but still talking to Lund. "Parents don't count when a bunch of good guys get together, do they? I remember those talks in the room at night."

"Thayer never said much. He was sort of a loner," Lund said.

"He talked a lot to me and Joey," Rogers said, looked at De Beers. "Isn't that right, Joey?"

"Sure, talked all the time," De Beers said. "All about his mother and dad, you know."

"His mother called him from Miami, right?" Shayne said.

"All the time," De Beers said.

"A good kid, Thayer. Friendly," Shayne said. "Kind of a mild kid, I guess. His father said—"

Lund was eager. "He wasn't! He was tough—real tough, you know?"

Shayne nodded seriously. The Lund boy was the one telling the truth. The other two had fallen neatly into his trap about the mother. He doubted that Thayer Edgeworth would have said two words about a mother who lived in France. The Lund boy needed to be encouraged.

"Tough, you say? Yes, that was what his father told me. A loner, withdrawn. Always making plans. I'll bet he had a good plan this time, right?"

Lund shrugged. "I don't know."

The fat kid seemed to have suddenly realized he was not playing the game right, and glanced sheepishly at Rogers. But now Rogers gave up the game. Lund had let too much out.

"He didn't tell us anything," Rogers said. "We don't know about any plan."

"How did he get over the fence?" Maple suddenly asked.

The boys closed ranks again, sullen.

"We don't know," Rogers said.

"He must have practiced," Shayne said. "He went to town often?"

"No. He never went to town," Rogers said.

Angry, Shayne glared at Maple with his steel-grey eyes. The cap-

tain had made them close-up against him. Damn fool, opening his idiot yap! Still, there was one more chance he could trap Lund. The fat boy was obviously an eager and compulsive talker.

"That's funny, he knew so many people in Marimba Beach," Shayne said. "I talked to them, and they said they—"

He stopped, shook his head as if having great difficulty understanding something. Lund could not stand it.

"He got a lot of phone calls from town!" Lund said eagerly. "I took some. From the Flamingo Grill!"

The boy said the name with something like awe in his voice. Shayne guessed that the Flamingo Grill was rather a wild place for a sixteen-year-old to be called from.

Shayne played along, hoping for more. "Of course, that's what they told me," he said. "They called him here, and he went over the fence into town. A friend picked him up on the road. I guess you boys do that a lot."

But Lund knew now he had talked too much. The Rogers boy looked innocent.

"Town? No, Mr. Shayne, we never go in. We love it here. I know Thayer wouldn't have done that."

After that they really closed ranks and clammed up. Shayne asked a few more leading questions, but even Lund was silent or evasive now. The fat boy looked at Rogers guiltily. Rogers just continued to smile and answer with polite evasion. Shayne knew he would get no more out of the boys. But he had something to go on.

He thanked the boys and left with Maple. The big captain apologized for his boys' antagonistic attitude. Shayne said he understood; he had not expected much help from the boys in tracking down Thayer. But he had gotten help.

V

MARIMBA BEACH was a small, shabby Gulf Coast resort town, dreary now in the rain. The main street consisted largely of bars with garish signs, and ended at the water, where commercial fishing boats mixed with the charter boats, all tied up and empty on this day of rain. In the early afternoon the rainy streets were all but deserted, the taverns mostly open but doing little trade.

The Flamingo Grill was two blocks from the water, just off the main street on a side street. It was a large tavern with a long bar on the left, tables on the right and in the rear around a small dance floor. At this hour there were few patrons, the single bartender yawning behind the bar as he polished glasses.

Shayne strode in and up to the bar, noting the signs of a brisk trade at night: a large service bar area at the rear of the long bar, the tables crammed together, a large

open space near the doors into the kitchen where the waitresses were stationed when not working.

At the bar Shayne took a stool and sat smiling. The bartender put down his towel and glasses and came up to Shayne.

"What'll it be, friend?"

"Sidecar. Easy on the cointreau."

The bartender began to work without a word. Shayne lighted a cigarette and waited. The bartender served the sidecar with a flourish and placed it on a paper napkin. Shayne sipped, sighed.

"Lousy day," Shayne said.

"We get 'em," the bartender said.

"Bad for business?"

The bartender shook his head. "Maybe in the day. Don't seem to matter at night. We pack them in no matter what."

"Everybody drinks," Shayne said.

"You can say that again."

Shayne nodded, looked at the bartender. "I'm looking for a kid. Name of Thayer Edgeworth."

"Yeah? What for?" The bartender said mildly.

"Nothing serious. His father wants him, that's all. No trouble, just to locate him."

Shayne laid a five dollar bill on the bar. The bartender looked at it, shrugged, and picked it up. The bartender folded the bill neatly and slipped it into his shirt pocket.

"He comes in here, only not for a while," the man said. "What'd he do, take a powder on the old man?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "From the school."

"School?"

"St. Edmunds," Shayne said.

"Alcatraz!" the bartender said. "He was out there? Hell, you could of fooled me. They don't let those kids out much. That's why we call it Alcatraz."

"You didn't know he was from St. Edmunds?" Shayne asked, his grey eyes narrowed.

"Hell no. He never said. He come in here a lot the last couple weeks. Hell, I never figured. I mean, he used to come in last summer, the summer before. Who figured. A real wild kid, but okay. Yeh, Thayer is okay."

"He's been coming in here for years? You served him?"

"Ginger ale—officially. Maybe he and Sally cheated a little and he had some booze. He's eighteen or more."

"Sixteen," Shayne said.

"You could of fooled me. Big kid. That means he was only maybe fourteen when he come in first? Hell, nobody tells the truth!"

"If he only drank ginger ale, why come in a bar so often?"

The bartender pointed to a bandstand in the rear at the edge of the dance floor. "The combo. We got a great combo here. A lot of kids come in Sunday afternoons—no booze. He come in for the

combo and Sally. He liked the boys in the combo."

Shayne asked, "Who's Sally? You mentioned her twice."

"Waitress. A good kid. She likes Thayer. The kid was sure sweet on her, even if she is too old for him. I told her, but he throws dough around, you know? A girl likes a guy spends on her, even if he is only a kid."

"How old is this Sally?"

"Twenty-three, twenty-six maybe. Who knows with dames these days? The kids looks old, the old dames looks like kids. You tell me."

"Where is Sally?"

"She comes on at seven."

"How about now?"

The bartender looked out through the wide window at the rain. He shrugged. "A day like this, home I guess. That's Twenty-three Canon Street. Out on the edge of town near the bay. Just go along Front Street, you'll find it."

"Thanks," Shayne said. He paid for his drink and left.

In the street he walked to his car. The rain suddenly stopped, as it did in this part of Florida, and a thin sun broke through. Already the day was warming. Shayne looked up and saw that the sun would soon be out hot. He decided to walk.

He went down to the water and Front Street. He turned left and crossed Front Street to walk along the edge of the water. The boats

were still tied up and deserted in the sudden sun. As he reached the edge of town, where the houses thinned out but the piers still jutted out into the deep water of the bay, he stopped to look down at the water.

Then he walked on and passed a parked car. He glanced at the car but it was empty. Out on the water he watched two rowboats with outboard motors heading out to fish. It was then, as he stopped to look at the boats, that he sensed something. Something about the parked car he had passed. He could not place it, some sixth sense that told him the car was not quite right where—

As he turned the shots rang out.

Two shots, close together. A searing pain stabbed and burned his left arm.

In the split second after the burning pain and the shots, he turned and saw a vague figure in the parked car. Saw the muzzle of a pistol.

That was all he saw.

He hurled himself backwards and went over the edge into the water. His head struck against a pier piling and he went under.

VI

BENEATH THE surface of the still water Shayne went down and down. The water of the harbor was deep enough for boats, but not much deeper, and he struck bottom. The pain of his shoulder wound burned and cleared his mind. He struck for the surface. Lungs bursting, he saw sunlight above, a shadow to his right. Hanging on, he kicked and swam under the water for the shadow.

Shayne came up beneath the pier. He gulped air and stroked deeper beneath the darkness of the pier. For a time he slowly trod water, breathing deeply, letting his head clear completely. He inspected his wound. It was a superficial flesh wound, but it was bleeding and would need treatment. Cautiously, Shayne swam to where he could look out and up from beneath the pier.

The waterfront walk seemed deserted. No one had come to see what the shots had been. Very carefully, he swam back beneath the pier and peered out the other side. There was no one and nothing. He swam to a ladder and climbed up to the pier, his automatic out and ready. The pier was empty. There was no one on Front Street, and the parked car was gone now.

Shayne climbed out onto Front Street and walked down a side street looking for a doctor.

After two blocks he found a doctor. At first the doctor did not want to treat him, but Shayne showed him his license, and told the doctor it was perfectly okay if he reported the wound to the police. The wound bandaged, Shayne left. He told the doctor he was heading for the police station. He did not go to the police station. He walked to his car and got in.

Already he was feeling a little faint. The wound had been deeper than he had thought. The loss of blood was getting to him. He drove to a motel on the southern edge of Marimba Beach, checked in, and collapsed on the bed.

Before he went to sleep, his mind raced with the question: Who had shot him? Why? What was Thayer Edgeworth mixed up in?

It was dark when the red-head opened his eyes. For a long minute he lay there, not sure where he was. Then he remembered. He looked at his watch. It read half-past sev-

en. He had been asleep for over six hours. He started to get up, groaned at the sharp pain in his shoulder, and lay back.

He lighted a cigarette and the thoughts returned. Who had shot him and why? Thayer Edgeworth himself? It was a strong possibility, he thought grimly. The boy sounded a bit more than wild. Someone at St. Edmunds who had something to hide? Some involvement with Thayer? That was possible, too. Only those at St. Edmunds knew he was in Marimba Beach and what he was there for.

The bartender? Also possible. The girl, Sally someone, was also a possibility. Or someone he did not know at all. But at least he now knew one thing—there was more to the disappearance of Thayer Edgeworth than a boyish runout! Someone in the affair had a gun and was not above using it!

Shayne finished his cigarette and got up. Slowly this time, very slowly. He swayed for a moment. He checked his shoulder wound. It had bled some more, despite the stitches the doctor had taken, but seemed to have stopped now. He flexed the fingers of his left hand. That hurt, but he could move them if he had to. He might have to.

He was more than anxious to meet the man who had shot him. He lighted another cigarette, washed, shaved the thick red stubble on his gaunt face, brushed his suit, which was now dry, and sat thinking about where to start now. The answer was simple—where he had left off. He would talk to the girl Sally.

It was almost eight o'clock. That meant she would be at work at The Flamingo Grill. He clapped his panama on his head, winced from the pain in his left shoulder, and strode out to his car. He drove back into Marimba Beach and parked a block from The Flamingo Grill. When he entered the tavern this time he was greeted by a blast of noise and pandemonium.

Young people danced, older people drank. It was hard to decide which group made more noise, the dancers or the drinkers. Probably it was the wildly energetic group of musicians who jumped, twitched, strummed and blasted horns on the bandstand.

Shayne saw his bartender acquaintance through the noise and the smoke. The bartender raised an eyebrow when he saw the tear in the sleeve of Shayne's suit coat, where the bullet had ripped.

"Small accident," Shayne said. "Is Sally here?"

The bartender nodded to a small, dark girl who had a figure that was wasted on a waitress in a smoky room. "That's her. The boss don't like them to talk on duty. She'll get a break in about an hour."

"What would I do in here for an hour?" Shayne said.

The bartender grinned. Five dol-

lars bought a lot in Marimba Beach, Shayne decided.

"Where's the boss?" the detective asked.

"There," the bartender said, nodding toward a short, fat man with a black mustache who leaned on a corner of the bar watching the waitresses hungrily and the customers happily.

Shayne swam through the smoke and noise. The owner, Mr. D'Ammato according to the barkeep, blinked up as Shayne stood over him. D'Ammato blanched for an instant—big strangers obviously said trouble to the owner.

"No trouble," Shayne said. "I just want to talk to one of your waitresses."

"You want to talk to a waitress is trouble," D'Ammato said. "You got a name?"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne."

"The detective? This ain't Miami."

"I get around. Do I talk to the girl?"

"Which one?"

"Sally."

"No trouble?"

"Routine talk."

"Use my office. I'll send her right in."

Shayne ambled into the tiny private office to wait. Even behind the closed door the noise was deafening. He did not have to wait long. The pretty, dark-haired girl came in. She did not seem scared. She sat on the desk, crossed her legs, and lighted a cigarette. She looked at Shayne.

"Billy told me you was in earlier," the girl said. "Billy's the bartender."

"So I gathered."

"What took you so long to get to me?"

"I was resting. I took a swim."

"Some detective."

"Tell me about Thayer Edgeworth?" Shayne said.

The girl smoked, shrugged. "What's to tell? I knew he was just a kid, but I liked him. He spent big. For a kid he acted a lot older. He showed me a good time, so I was nice to him. You get me?"

"Yeah," Shayne said, "I get you. I'd say he got his money's worth."

"I don't get no complaints," Sally said.

"You saw him a lot, Sally?"

The girl said. "Yeah. Since he showed up two weeks ago. I mean, I knew him from last summer. Then he showed up a couple weeks ago. He had a car. He come in all the time—at night, I mean. You know, late, after nine."

"All the time?"

"Near every night."

Shayne could think of no reason for the girl to lie, but he kept an open mind. The girl knew he was in town, and he had been shot on the way to talk to her. However, he was talking to her now, and she seemed to be telling the truth. Which left him with the boys at St. Edmunds as the liars, which was

much more probable. Teen-age boys had covered for a friend before this.

"Every night," Shayne said. "Did you know he was out at St. Edmunds?"

"He never said."

"When is the last time you saw him?"

"Four, maybe five days," Sally said. "No, four, I remember. We was supposed to go on a kind of beach party. He never showed. Billy had to take me. Billy likes me, too."

"The bartender?"

"Who else?"

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "Four days? You're sure it wasn't two days?"

"Four," the girl said. "I can count, mister."

"I'll bet you can," Shayne said.

The girl bristled. "Is that a crack?"

"Would I insult a nice girl like you?"

The girl was mollified. "Well—"

But Shayne was thinking again. If Sally were telling the truth, and the bartender was also telling the truth, Thayer Edgeworth had spent a lot of time in Marimba Beach, when he was suposed to be safely locked up behind the high iron fence of St. Edmunds Academy. Which meant that the boys were all covering for him, which was very possible.

But it also meant a lot of going over or under or through that fence, and a lot of traveling on the highway between.

There was one other possibility. Shayne took out the picture of Thayer Edgeworth given to him by the missing boy's father. He held it out to Sally Rozman. The girl looked at it. She nodded.

"Yeah, that's Thayer. He looks older now. That must be a year old. But that sure is him. Real handsome, ain't he?" the girl said.

Shayne sighed. "What else can you tell me. Where did he keep his car?"

"At his place, I guess."

"He had a place, a room?"

"I don't like motels," the girl said.

Again Shayne thought. He tugged harder on his ear. Neither the car nor the apartment figured in what Roderick Edgeworth had told him. The car probably explained how he got away from St. Edmunds, and it removed the need for outside help. Shayne guessed that there were many places to hide a car along the lonely road near the school. And a room in town gave him a place for friends and also kept him hidden.

"I guess I should of known he was out at St. Edmunds," the girl said.

"Why?"

"On account he never showed up in the day."

Shayne nodded. That much figured.

"What else can you tell me?"

The girl shrugged. "What else is there? I mean, he was a guy I saw; I didn't live with him. Maybe you should ask Tiny."

"Tiny?"

"Yeh," Sally said, "Tiny Cavendish. He runs a poker game in a motel just out of town. Thayer used to sit in. Thayer did pretty good, I heard. I heard Tiny figured he had a rich-kid sucker, but Thayer played good."

Gambling! Shayne recalled the sullen moodiness they had all reported at St. Edmunds. The sense of waiting about Thayer Edgeworth. Maybe the boy was in deeper than he could get out. And professional gamblers were not above taking a shot at a private detective who looked like he might get in their way.

"Where do I find this Tiny?"

"You don't," the girl said. "At least not now. The game don't start till after ten o'clock. It moves around. You'll have to get word to Tiny you want to play. Talk to D'Ammato; he can fix it."

Shayne nodded. "And what about Thayer's room? Where is it?"

The girl gave an address that was on the edge of town not far from Shayne's motel. He thanked her and left the office. He stopped to talk to D'Ammato and arranged to meet Tiny Cavendish at the poker game. Then he went out and got into his car.

He drove slowly to the address the Rozman girl had given him. The disappearance of Thayer Edgeworth was beginning to look not at all a simple prank. The boy had been very busy for the two weeks before he vanished. And the peculiar discrepancy of two days bothered Shayne. Thayer had vanished from the school, with the major's cash, two days ago. The girl and the bartender had not seen Thayer for four days. Why?

When Shayne reached the dark house, he was still puzzling over the two days.

VII

SHAYNE STOOD in front of the small house and realized that he had assumed that Thayer Edgeworth would take a room, or a cabin in a motel, but that he was wrong. He had probably counted without the boy's money. And yet, what he had assumed was logical. A boy alone would be expected to take a place where his bed would be made for him, his room cleaned, even his meals cooked.

Thayer Edgeworth had not done this. Instead the house was a small bungalow set far back from the road and isolated from its neighbors. As if the boy had been hiding.

Shayne walked through the small gate and up the narrow walk among trees until he reached the front door. The house was dark and silent. There was no milk or newspapers to indicate how long

since anyone had lived there, but Shayne had not thought there would be—it was doubtful if Thayer, using the place only at night, would have subscribed to newspapers or taken milk.

The door was locked. Shayne took out his ring of keys and picklocks. The lock was a simple one, and the third key he tried opened the door. Shayne stepped inside and closed the door silently behind him. He stood in a small living room that, even in the dark, he could see was shabbily furnished with as little furniture as possible. He turned on the light.

He carefully searched the living room but found nothing beyond some matches from The Flamingo Grill, some magazines obviously read, and the remains of three bags of potato chips.

Shayne moved on through the small house. There were three other rooms—a bedroom, a dining room that had never been used and the kitchen. In the bedroom Shayne stared at the unmade bed that had clearly been slept in and more than once. Sally Rozman was a generous girl, and Thayer Edgeworth a precocious sixteen-year-old. In the bedroom he found more match books from The Flamingo Grill, from other local taverns, and from a motel that he guessed was one of the locations of the poker game.

In the kitchen he found the first really puzzling matter: there was considerable food in the refrigerator. Breakfast food—eggs, milk, bread, cereal, some sausage. He smelled the milk. It was just beginning to sour. Four days not two. So Thayer had not returned here.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. If the food had been fresh he would have considered that Thayer Edgeworth had come here after his escape from St. Edmunds. But with the milk going sour, the food had to have been here at least four days, more likely five to a week.

He looked around the kitchen carefully. There was a single plate, cup and saucer in the drying basket, plus two glasses. A bottle of bourbon, half full, was all that was in the food cabinets. But in another cabinet he found sugar, salt and three more bags of potato chips. He sat down at the kitchen table to think.

The breakfast food bothered him. Thayer Edgeworth had been at school for breakfast every day until he disappeared. The boys could not have covered for breakfast. Then who had eaten the food?

Some third party no one knew? Or some town friend Thayer had met and befriended? That sounded like the teenager. Or maybe the girl? That would fit, except wouldn't she have mentioned the fact if Thayer had left her each night? Still, it was the best explanation. He made a mental note to ask her.

He made one more quick search to be sure he had missed nothing, and found that he had. In the bedroom closet there were men's clothes and a suitcase. Thayer Edgeworth had planned, and lived, a real double life. But, then, why had the boy not taken the clothes with him? Was he still hiding somewhere in Marimba Beach?

Shayne turned quickly and left the house. He walked around to the rear. The gaunt red-head stopped short when he saw the car. It was parked directly behind the house where a dirt alley passed in the rear of all the houses here. Shayne opened the door and peered in. In the glove compartment he found a temporary registration dated only two weeks ago and in the name of John Roderick.

Shayne narrowed his steely grey eyes. John *Roderick!* And Thayer Edgeworth's father was *Roderick* Edgeworth. The address on the registration was that of the empty house behind him.

He searched the small car but found nothing. He turned to leave, to ask a few questions of Sally Rozman when he suddenly stopped.

The odor was unmistakeable.

Shayne had smelled the odor many times in his life.

He walked slowly to the rear of the car.

The odor came from the trunk. The trunk was locked. He walked back to the front and took the keys from the ignition. Then he returned to the trunk. He stood there for some moments without opening the trunk.

He was not sure what he preferred to find—a stranger or a familiar face.

He took a deep breath and opened the trunk. The body lay twisted in a ball like a baby in the womb.

Shayne leaned in and looked at the face.

Then he turned, closed the trunk, and went into the house to find a telephone and report the body of Thayer Edgeworth.

Four hours later Shayne sat in the office of Lieutenant Bob Edwards of the State Police. Shayne and Edwards were old acquaintances. Edwards was summing up.

"Blunt instrument on the back of the head. Or a fall against a rock or some other hard object. Bruise on the chin, too. Some other bruises. Jaw was broken. Medical examiner says he died instantly from the blow on the head. Just a kid."

"Sixteen," Shayne said. "His father is going to take it hard. He already feels guilty about neglecting the boy."

"He's on his way now, flying over from Miami," Edwards said.

"Anything on the boy?"

Edwards shrugged. "A little money in his pockets, a real bundle of cash in his wallet. Pictures of about six girls, including Sally Rozman. We're talking to her now, only it doesn't figure to be her."

"What about the time of death?" Shayne asked.

"ME says not until a full autopsy tomorrow. Could be anywhere from two days to a week. From what you tell me it has to be about two days."

Shayne nodded. "He must have been killed almost as soon as he left the school. How big was that bundle of cash?"

"About nine hundred dollars!" Edwards said.

Shayne raised a ragged red eyebrow. "Nine hundred? That's damned strange."

Shayne explained the theft at the school. Edwards swore. The state police lieutenant was angry.

"Damn it, Granger should have reported it! We'd have found the body sooner. You know how valuable a day is in a murder case."

But Shayne was thinking of something else. "Robbery looks out, and so does a real grudge killing. The money would have been taken."

"Robbery, yes," Edwards said. "But a grudge killer could have been afraid someone would know the kid had money on him."

Shayne rubbed his ear. "Maybe."

He stood up. "Mind if I do a little looking around while I wait for Edgeworth to show up?

"Go ahead, Mike, but keep in touch," Edwards said. "I've got routine to do. I guess I better notify them at the school. They might want to come in and see if anything on the boy means something to them."

Shayne nodded and left. Outside the police barracks he lighted a cigarette before getting into his car. The idea of a grudge killing worked in his mind—money not taken; bruises; jaw broken; blunt instrument or fall. Shayne decided that he wanted to have a talk with Tiny Cavendish. He drove into Marimba Beach. At this midnight hour the town was as bright as day and twice as lively.

Shayne parked in the dark lot of the shabby motel. It was the third cabin from the road according to D'Ammato, who had told him that Tiny would be glad to have him in the game. Shayne was not at all sure Tiny Cavendish was going to be happy. He walked to the third cabin from the road. He knocked three times short, two long, one short. The door opened.

A giant man peered out. "Shayne?"

"Yeah," he said.

"Step in," the big man said.

Shayne guessed that this big man was, of course, Tiny Cavendish. He

stepped into the motel cabin and found the game. Six men sat around a round table. The big man, Tiny, took the seventh seat. Five card stud, no variations. An eighth seat was open. Shayne slipped into the seat and the cards began to fall without a word spoken.

He sat there for some time, holding his own. His cards were neither good nor bad, he folded out of most hands. Tiny Cavendish watched him with both approval and an interest that indicated that the gambler did not think Shayne had come just for the poker. He was sure that Cavendish had spotted his gun under his coat.

At that point he got his first really good hand—queens back to back. There were no other face cards showing except a jack to his left, and no queens anywhere. Shayne laid the money on them.

"Ten on the queen," Shayne said.

Tiny Cavendish, showing a ten, paid attention to the game. The big gambler saw the ten dollars, which meant he had tens paired or was a damn fool. The player with the jack saw also, and Shayne figured him for an ace in the hole and a damn fool (if he had jacks paired he would, or should, have raised once to see if the queen had a partner). Three others dropped at once. The last, showing a deuce of hearts, saw! Shayne knew this one was a poor player and had the ace of hearts in the hole.

The cards came around. Shayne pulled a five, Tiny Cavendish a nine, the player with the jack a seven, and the sucker with the deuce of hearts pulled a nine of hearts. Shayne bet the limit, another ten dollars. He was called around, and inside he stared at them. He had, they had to get, and they were chasing.

The fourth card came: for Shayne an ace, for Tiny Cavendish a seven, for the man with jack-seven another jack, and for the man with the hearts a spade ten. The pair of jacks now bet ten dollars. Tiny Cavendish folded out fast. Shayne raised ten, and the sucker with the hidden heart ace folded reluctantly. The man with the paired jacks and the praying ace in the hole just saw.

The last card was a seven to the pair of jacks, making two pair showing, and a five to Shayne, giving him fives paired to go with his wired queens. The open two-pair bet twenty-five on the last round.

Shayne bumped him twenty-five. The man stared, sighed, believed, and tossed in his twenty-five like the sucker he was. Shayne raked in his winnings. It was too easy.

The deal passed. Shayne looked at Tiny Cavendish, who was watching him with interest and a certain admiration. Shayne decided that Tiny made a good living from the suckers in the game, and that the big man had probably

been a first-rate player but had gotten into bad habits by playing with bad players. Tiny had stayed in the last hand at least one card too long. But the big gambler had read the hands right, and when the third ace and third ten showed had gone fast.

Shayne looked at his hole card —a king, with a ten showing. No one else showed higher than a king. The bet was only a dollar from a jack high card. Shayne saw the dollar, looked at Tiny Cavendish. "You know Thayer Edgeworth, Tiny?"

Cavendish looked at the hole card he had to match his showing eight. "I know him, Shayne."

The cards came around. Shayne caught a second king, Cavendish a queen, the man with the jack another king. Two men got aces, and a man showing a seven caught another seven. The man with the pair showing bet the early limit, ten dollars. Cavendish with his queen-eight called. The jack-king raised. Shayne got out fast; the kings were dead. One of the aces saw. The sevens re-raised. Shayne smiled and groaned inside as the jack-king, obviously paired with the fourth king in the hole, called. Cavendish and his queens hidden folded. The ace called.

Shayne said, "He was kind of young to play here."

"He was young, but he played good. Too good. He took a lot of cash out of the game."

"How come you let him start playing?"

"He had the money, Shayne. He said he was eighteen. I believed him. He played good; he was real proud of that."

Shayne and Cavendish both watched the obvious three sevens rake in the money, and the man with the paired kings act surprised. Some guys just shouldn't play poker. The man with the two pairs, aces up, simply folded his cards—a good player, he had not seen the last raise.

"How often did he play?" Shayne asked.

"Maybe four times in two weeks. He was due a couple days ago, only he never showed," Tiny said.

"How many days ago?"

"Three, four. I ain't sure."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe—the two days again. The town seemed to have seen the last of Thayer Edgeworth about four days ago, the school only two days ago. What had Thayer been doing in those two days? Simply finalizing his plans at school? That was the obvious explanation, and was probably all there was to it.

"He's missing, Tiny," Shayne lied. "You have any idea where he might have gone?"

"Hell no. I hardly knew the kid."

"How much did he take out of the game?"

"Four, five hundred."

"And you liked him?"

"It wasn't my money. He was a

snotty kid, but a lot of people are snotty," Cavendish said.

"You have no idea what happened to him?"

"Try his girls. Maybe he told them," Tiny said.

"Girls? You mean Sally Rozman?"

"Sally and the kid at the soda fountain," Tiny said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "Kid at what soda fountain?"

"Who knows her name? Just a kid works at Gulf Pharmacy on Front Street," Cavendish said.

Another girl? But Sally Rozman had said Thayer was with her almost every night. Shayne stood up. Cavendish looked at him.

"Got what you wanted?"

Shayne grinned. "And got paid for it."

"Gulf Pharmacy ain't open till tomorrow mornin'," Cavendish said. "Stay a while. I like competition."

"You need some," Shayne said, heading for the door. "I've got business. Maybe I'll be back."

"Do that. We play late," Cavendish said.

Outside, Shayne walked to his car and drove back to police headquarters on the highway. Edgeworth should have made it from Miami by now.

VIII

RODERICK EDGEWORTH sat in the Office of Lieutenant Edwards. The

tycoon held his head in his hands. Edwards smoked a cigarette and looked out at the night through his windows. Shayne put his big hand on the shoulder of the distraught father. Edgeworth did not move or look up. He spoke through his hands.

"Was it me? Did I neglect him too much?"

"Who knows?" Shayne said. "Kids don't always need a reason to get into trouble."

Edgeworth held his head. "It's hard, you know? Starting a business, getting it going, keeping it tops. It's not easy. You have to work, work hard, work all the time. If his mother—"

Edgeworth looked up, the tears staining his face. "No, I won't blame her. She went, but I was here."

"Take it easy," Edwards said.

"How do you know?" Edgeworth said. "The other two, they're fine, they're good. But Thayer? How do you know?"

"You don't," Shayne said. "You try and you hope."

"Hope? Yes, and try. I didn't

try enough, did I? No, not me! I knew he was disturbed, but I sent him up here instead of taking time. I palmed him off on a school. I couldn't even find time to come up myself when he disappeared, could I? Now I don't have to worry about him anymore. Now I know where he is!"

Shayne and Edwards looked at each other. The distraught father seemed on the verge of a breakdown. But Edgeworth glanced up then and saw them looking at each other. The tycoon suddenly breathed deeply, wiped his eyes.

"No, I'm not going off my rocker. Not yet anyway. My boy is dead —killed! Now I want to know why and who! What have you found out, Shayne? What am I paying you for?!"

"Take it easy," Edwards said again. "We'll find the killer."

"I asked Shayne what he'd learned!" Edgeworth snapped.

Shayne explained what he had learned. He told of the moodiness, the silent withdrawn nature of the boy at school. He told of the calls from the bar, and of the girls and the poker and the visits to The Flamingo Grill. He explained about the small house in town, the money, and the car. Edgeworth listened in disbelief.

"He had a house in town? A car and nine hundred dollars? This is crazy, Shayne! I got letters from him every two days saying how happy he was at the school! How did he get out all the time!? I'll sue that school for everything it's got!"

"It looks like he had the whole thing well organized, Edgeworth. He had to have the boys cover for him. Where did he get the original money? I mean, he won a lot in that poker game, but he had to have some to start with."

Edgeworth held his head again. "He had an allowance of a hundred dollars a month, sometimes more. I expect he saved some. I suppose he gambled in Miami. He always was good at cards; he had a mathematical mind. But in Miami there were few places he could play. I don't know, Shayne. I suppose he could have had a few hundred dollars."

Shayne frowned. "I figure he started with more than that. What I don't figure is why he stole the three hundred dollars from St. Edmunds. He had money; he won at poker. Why take the risk of stealing a lousy three hundred dollars?"

"Maybe he needed just that much more," Edwards said. "You told me Professor Escudo said he seemed mighty interested in Brazil."

Edgeworth began to pace, highly agitated. "They let him into that bar? Into that poker game! At sixteen! I'll have them crucified! There's no telling who he met in places like that! That's what killed him! Those people killed my boy! I'll—"

Edgeworth looked around wildly. Shayne watched the young tycoon through narrowed eyes. Edgeworth was cracking. He nodded to Edwards. Edwards pressed his intercom.

"Send the doc in," Edwards said.

"Doctor?" Edgeworth snapped. "I don't need a doctor! I need some action! I need some police work! I'll go to the governor if I have to! I'll break you all if you don't—"

The doctor came into the room with two uniformed troopers. The doctor watched Edgeworth, then walked to the hysterical father. Edgeworth pulled away, then swayed, and suddenly sat down heavily on the floor. The doctor motioned to the two troopers. They picked Edgeworth up.

"You need some rest," the doctor said. "I'll give you something."

Edgeworth nodded, his legs weak and buckling as the two troopers held him.

"Let him sleep in the back room," Edwards said. "There's not much we can do tonight anymore anyway. We'll find the man, Mr. Edgeworth."

The tycoon nodded again. The doctor and the troopers led him away. Edwards stood up. He turned to Shayne.

"I think we all better get some sleep. Tomorrow I want to find that killer," Edwards said.

"You know," Shayne said, "I don't feel sleepy at all. I had a nap this afternoon."

Edwards grinned. "Just don't tell me where the game is."

"What game?" Shayne said innocently.

He was still grinning when he got into his car in front of headquarters. He drove straight back to the motel and the third cabin from the road.

The sun was already up when Shayne stretched, and Tiny Cavendish yawned and announced that he had had enough. The losers did not want to leave. The big gambler assured the losers that the game would convene again that night, at a location he would tell them about later. Shayne had watched Cavendish, and the others, all through the game.

He had casually mentioned Thayer Edgeworth, and noted their reactions. None of them seemed either worried or particularly interested. Now, as the game broke up, Shayne gathered up his winnings. He had done very well. In the end, only Cavendish and himself had been real winners. Two men had held their own.

The other four were going home poorer and, Shayne knew, not much wiser.

Outside the cabin, the morning sun dazzling in the resort town, Shayne considered what to do. He could use some sleep by now, but he expected that Roderick Edgeworth would want to be on the job as early as possible. Still, there was one thing he would like to do while

he was in town—visit the Gulf Pharmacy.

He went to the motel office and called police headquarters. The sergeant reported that Edwards had not come in yet, nothing had happened, and Roderick Edgeworth, under the influence of the doctor's powerful sleeping shot, was still asleep. Shayne told the sergeant to tell Edwards that he would be in the Gulf Pharmacy if he was needed, and after that would be out to headquarters.

When he drove to Front Street, the Gulf Pharmacy was not yet open. Shayne found a diner that was open and went in for his breakfast. He ordered six eggs scrambled, three orders of toast, and a pot full of coffee. The coffee was bad, but the eggs were good. He lingered over his coffee until he saw a small, bald man unlock the door of the Gulf Pharmacy and go in. Shayne paid and walked across to the pharmacy.

The bald man worked behind the prescription counter. Shayne saw that the pharmacy was one of those modern affairs with just about everything for sale except drugs—only this one had a drug department, too. There was a soda fountain, a juke box, racks of stockings, bathing accessories, candy, tobacco, toys, stationery, etc.

The bald man looked up. "Yes? Can I help you?"

"I hope so," Shayne said. The bald man seemed like a fairly timid, law-abiding type. Shayne decided on the policeman approach. He flashed his credentials just fast enough for the bald man to see the Miami police department name. "Police business. What can you tell me about a kid named Thayer Edgeworth?"

The bald man blinked. "Thayer? Why? Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"I figured you could tell me. It's all confidential, of course," Shayne said very officially.

The bald man was serious. "Well, no. He seemed like a nice steady boy to me. Polite and well-spoken. From rather a good family, you know."

"You know his family?"

"Oh yes, they vacation here sometimes. His father and brothers anyway. I understand the mother is in Europe."

"He came in here often?"

"Oh yes. We were rather friendly. Then, of course, there was Jennifer. She's my assistant. I think they were quite interested in each other. Oh, I'd heard some things about Thayer, that he was wild and associated with some unsavory types, but I never really put much stock in that. Of course, he did seem to have too much money, but I blame that on his father."

"Do you stay open late?"

"Late? Why not, why do you ask?"

"You said Thayer came in here often." Shayne said.

"He did, almost every day. Usually in the morning to talk to Jennifer, and later in the afternoon to take her to the beach or wherever young people go these days."

Shayne stared. "In the morning? The afternoon? That's not possible!"

The bald man blanched. "I assure you it is—"

"In the daytime? During the last two weeks?"

"Almost every day. You can ask Jennifer. I—"

Shayne tugged furiously on his left earlobe. Damn! It had been staring him in the face. The description of the boy at school that did not sound like Thayer Edgeworth! He was about to ask another question when the telephone rang. The bald man went to answer. After a moment the bald man turned to Shayne.

"Is your name Mike Shayne?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That was Lieutenant Edwards. He wants you at headquarters right away. He said it was urgent."

Shayne nodded. He had something urgent to tell Edwards. And damn again, it had been staring him in the face.

"When did you see Thayer last?" Shayne asked the bald man.

"Four days ago, on Saturday afternoon. He got a call from St. Edmunds. He said he was going up there so I gave him a prescription I had to deliver out there."

"A call? Do you know who it was from?"

"No, he didn't give a name. Just said to tell Thayer Edgeworth to get out there about nine o'clock. To go to the common room. I remember Thayer seemed nervous, upset."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

He left the Gulf Pharmacy and ran for his car. He drove straight to the State police barrack. Edwards was waiting for him in his office. The lieutenant was not alone. Roderick Edgeworth sat on a chair looking confused. The medical examiner was standing at the window looking bored. Major Granger and Captain Maple were seated on straight chairs. Shayne started to talk the moment he entered, his eyes on the major.

"Bob, I think that—" Shayne began.

Edwards held up his hand. "Hold it a minute Mike. Tell him, doc."

The medical examiner shrugged. "The final autopsy showed that the boy had been dead about four days when Shayne found him. So what? I told you it could—"

Roderick Edgeworth swore. "But Granger told me Thayer only left the school two days before he called me yesterday!"

Major Granger shook his head slowly, and looked at Captain Maple. "The boy you found dead isn't Thayer Edgeworth. At least, it isn't the boy we had at St. Edmunds who

said he was Thayer Edgeworth. Right, Captain?"

"Yes sir," Maple said. "Our Thayer was not the dead boy."

IX

IN THE silence of the office Mike Shayne tugged on his earlobe and nodded. He spoke to Edwards.

"Yeah, that was what I was going to tell you, Bob." He explained what the bald man had said at the Gulf Pharmacy. "So if he was there in the drugstore in the day, and in The Flamingo Grill or Tiny's game at night, he couldn't have been at St. Edmunds. There had to be *two* Thayers!"

Roderick Edgeworth shook his head. "I don't understand. You mean that Thayer was never at the school? How could that be? I mean it is—" The young tycoon trailed off.

Shayne began to pace the quiet office. "There's only one explanation. Thayer and this other kid pulled the switch. They made some kind of deal, probably a very funny teen-age prank, and the other kid took Thayer's place at St. Edmunds, while Thayer lived it up high and handsome here in Marimba Beach. Only something went wrong."

"Very wrong," Edwards said.

"Why would a boy volunteer to take Thayer's place?" Major Granger said. "I like my school, but it's not a teenager's heaven, I assure you. Do you think Thayer paid the other boy?"

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "It almost looks like the opposite. Thayer had money in town. The unknown kid stole the three hundred from your office."

"But—" Edgeworth began uncertainly.

Shayne cut in. "One thing, Bob," he said to Edwards. "That druggist said Thayer, the real Thayer, got a call from the school and was told to go out there. That was the night he was killed."

Edwards nodded. "Something went very wrong. The other kid killed him. Why?"

"I don't know yet, but I've got some ideas. Maybe the other kid was hiding out. Anyway, I think the answer will be in Miami. That was where the two kids had to meet."

Roderick Edgeworth agreed,

still confused. "Thayer hadn't been out of Miami for six months."

Shayne turned to Major Granger. "Did you take any pictures of the boy you thought was Thayer Edgeworth?"

Captain Maple shook his head. "No, we never—"

Granger snapped his fingers. "Wait a minute. There was that group shot of his barrack! Remember? I think we can give you a group, if that will help, Shayne."

"Let's go and see," Shayne said. "I want to talk with the boys again anyway."

"I'll continue working on this end to see if I can come up with anything," Edwards said.

"Right," Shayne said. "And I'd like to fly back down with you, Mr. Edgeworth. You can tell me about Thayer's friends, where he hung out, all of that."

Edgeworth nodded. "Of course, Shayne."

The detective led Major Granger and Captain Maple out of the office.

The picture turned out to be a shot of two rows of boys wearing their military uniforms. But the fake Thayer was clear and definite in the first rank. Granger pointed him out to Shayne. The two boys were very much alike to look at. Which, Shayne thought, had probably given one of them the idea.

"All right," Shayne said. "Now can I talk to those roommates of his again?"

This time Major Granger himself took Shayne to the low frame building and the room of the fake Thayer. The three boys had been alerted, and were waiting in their accustomed position of semi-arrogant truculence, standing close but not side-by-side. They were arranged in the room, against the desks and bunk-beds, so that all three could not be looked at once.

Shayne wasted no time this time. "All right. Now I want some answers. I want to know everything you can tell me about the boy you knew as Thayer Edgeworth."

Rogers did not bat an eye. "Gee, Mr. Shayne, what more can we tell you? I mean, we told you he didn't tell us nothing."

Lund, apparently well instructed since Shayne's last talk, stood in moody silence.

De Beers echoed his leader. "We told you everything we know, really."

Shayne let his steel grey eyes bore straight into the arrogant teen-age eyes of Rogers. For a moment the boy met him stare for stare. Then he looked away, flushed, a certain uneasiness showing on his face for the first time.

Shayne spoke slowly and coldly, his voice hard, his eyes like grey steel, his gaunt face set in grim seriousness.

"I'm going to tell you something, and I'm going to say it just once. After that you'll tell me what you know. Is that clear?"

"How can we—" De Beers began, glancing at Rogers, his face uneasy.

"Shut up!" Major Granger snapped. "Listen to Mr. Shayne!"

"All right. This is a murder case now. That's right. Thayer Edgeworth has been killed!"

The three boys shifted uneasily. They were pale, as pale as the sheets on their bunks. Rogers was the most pale, as if, being the leader, the shock were greatest for him. Shayne watched them. It had not been ruled out in his mind that one of these boys could be a killer. They had excellent opportunity to learn what had been going on, and the dead Thayer had been called back to the school, when, supposedly, no one at the school knew he existed except the fake Thayer. Shayne observed all three closely as he dropped his second bombshell.

"But not the Thayer Edgeworth you knew—or did you!"

Lund broke. "Not the Thayer we—"

"Right. It seems that there were two Thayer Edgeworths. One here rooming with you boys, and one in town. The real one was in Marimba Beach all the time. Now he's dead, and your roommate is missing. He is probably the killer. Now I want you to tell me all you know!"

In the silence of the dormitory room the three boys all stared at Mike Shayne. Then they stared at each other. Lund seemed scared. De Beer blinked his eyes as if unable to grasp what he had heard. Rogers licked his lips.

"Of course, Mr. Shayne," Rogers said. "Only I really don't know what to tell you. I mean, we sort of guessed he wasn't what he was supposed to be. He acted wrong. But he really was awful quiet. I mean, he was a real loner."

"He never talked much, didn't do any work," De Beers said. "Except—Well, he did ask a lot about South America. Brazil mostly. He was awful interested in Brazil and how to get there."

Shayne nodded. That bore out what Mr. Escudo had said. It also fitted into a theory Shayne was developing in his mind, that the fake Thayer was a boy in some kind of trouble and was on the run.

"Anything else?" Mike Shayne said.

Rogers hesitated. "Well, I guess you'd want to know about the car."

"Car?" Major Granger snapped.

"Yes sir," Rogers said. "One of the boys in Barrack four has a car in Marimba Beach. He had it brought out and lent it to Thayer. At least, the kid we knew as Thayer. You know, sir, I always had a funny feeling that not only wasn't he like the rest of us here, but he was older."

"That figures," Shayne said. "Which boy lent him the car?"

"Murray Hamton," Rogers said.

Shayne and Granger left and

called the Hamton boy to the major's office. The boy, afraid at first, finally admitted that he had loaned the car. Thayer had told the boy that he had to make a quick trip at night because his father was trying to break up a romance. The boy had believed it because the fake Thayer had been in Marimba Beach the Saturday before and said his girl was there. They were going to run off together.

"It's okay, Murray," Shayne said soothingly. "You couldn't have known."

Shayne got a description—blue Ford Mustang with stick shift—and the license number, an Arizona license.

Then Shayne left the school and drove back to Marimba Beach, where Edgeworth was waiting with his chartered light plane.

They took off into a bright noon sun.

X

ON THE TRIP to Miami Shayne got a list of friends and places in the Miami life of Thayer Edgeworth. The list was impressive, consisting of most of the better country and beach clubs, and a host of teen-age hangouts. The search for the place where the two boys met was not going to be simple.

Shayne left Roderick Edgeworth at the airport in Miami, and immediately returned to his Flagler street office. Lucy Hamilton was startled to see him.

"Michael! You didn't say that you—"

"I flew back, Angel. I arranged to have the car driven down by a mechanic. When he arrives, pay him; he'll have the bill. Now get me Chief Gentry. After that get me a photo-copy outfit and have them send a man up pronto."

In his private office the detective went to work preparing a list of his best informers. By that time Lucy had reached Will Gentry. The gruff Miami Chief of Police was friendly but hurried.

"Will, all I want is to know who down there could give me the fastest ident on a pic of a wanted man?" Shayne said.

"Depends what he's wanted for," Gentry said.

"I don't know what he's wanted for, and I don't know his name. Those are the things I want to find out from you."

"Hell, Mike, unless he's at least a one-time loser we probably won't have a pic."

"He might be a juvenile offender, almost sure to be."

"Okay, try juvenile. A kid, eh? Well, let's rule out Bunco or Safe and Loft, those boys are old pros. Probably rule out Homicide, too, I'd know of any juvenile we were looking for on Homicide. Still, we'll give them a try in case your boy could be a witness or something. Tell you what—for you,

Mike, I'll have it run through. Send me about a dozen mugs and I'll get the boys on it."

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said. "And one more job, okay?"

"Give you an inch . . . Okay, what now."

"Stolen car, nineteen sixty-five Ford Mustang, blue with stick shift. Arizona license fifty-four-B-twenty."

"Local only?"

Shayne sighed. "Better put it on the teletype everywhere, especially any Gulf and Atlantic ports."

"You ask so little," Gentry said and hung up.

Shayne grinned as he hung up. If there was anything, Gentry would find it. Ten minutes later the photocopy messenger arrived. Shayne gave him the group shot with the fake Thayer's face circled and ordered two dozen shots blown up as far as they would take.

After the messenger left, Shayne was on the telephone again for a long time. He went through the long ritual of contacting his informers. He told each of them that he wanted a lead on a hot juvenile, sixteen to twenty years old, who was looking for a quick trip to Brazil—quick but safe. He described the fake Thayer from the picture, promised them a name when he had it.

After that he called Tim Rourke at the *Miami Daily News*. He gave Rourke the same story, the same details, and promised to send a photo. Rourke said he would see what he could run down.

Then Shayne sat back, lit a cigarette and looked out at the low afternoon sun of the city. Now all he had to do was wait. He had set the wheels in motion, it was only a matter of time. All bases covered.

Hah! In a pig's eye it was. As full of holes as Swiss cheese.

Shayne sighed. If the make-believe Thayer wasn't already out of the country—he had a three-day start already, after all—there was no way of knowing that he was in the Miami area. From Marimba Beach he could have driven north, south, east or west. No, not quite that bad. East would lead him just about nowhere. North he would have to go a long way before he reached a place where there would be a good chance of a boat to Brazil.

No, his only really good bets from Marimba Beach were west to Mobile or New Orleans, or southeast to Miami. And Shayne was betting that he would return to a town he knew—Miami.

It was all only a guess: where he was going, who he was, why he had made such a deal with the real Thayer. It could be none of the things Shayne had guessed, and he could be driving straight for Alaska right at this moment.

But Shayne did not think so. He thought that the boy was on the run, was in Miami, and was looking for a boat to Brazil. That was

his educated guess. The feel of the seat of his pants said that the fake Thayer had returned to Miami and was on his way to Brazil.

Shayne smoked. Laughed. Of course, he could just as easily be in Eagle Rock looking for Mexico, or Los Angeles on his way to Pago Pago.

Lucy Hamilton buzzed. "The pictures are here, Michael."

"Good. Send a dozen straight over to Gentry, Angel, and one to Tim Rourke. Use a messenger."

The gaunt red-head stood up, clapped his panama on his thick hair, and walked out of his private office. He picked up the rest of the pictures.

"Stick around, Angel, Okay? I need the telephone monitored. I'll call in about every hour. I'm borrowing your car."

"Of course, Michael," his brown-eyed secretary said.

Shayne looked at the pictures as he walked. They were good, only a little fuzzy from the blow-up. In the elevator down to Flagler Street he realized that the fake Thayer did look a lot like the real Thayer, only older. No doubt of that. And there was a bonus. The fake Thayer had a strong feature, a drooping left eye, as if the muscles at the corner had been damaged. It gave him something of a Robert Mitchum look.

That was going to be a help.

In Lucy's car he drove toward the first Miami Beach "Go-Go" joint frequented by Thayer Edgeworth.

The girls danced on high platforms behind the bar—maximum gyrations in minimum space, the latest talent of the young. The band blared its maddening beat. Maddening because, big as he was he could not help twitching to the beat. He sighed again. The place was alive, the girls very young and slim and muscular.

The boys had long hair and the bartender had a beard.

"No, never saw that one," the bartender said, pocketing the five spot. "Sorry, Charley."

"Point out some regulars for the five," Shayne said.

The bartender obliged. The regulars, still twitching as they looked at his picture, had never seen the face either.

The late afternoon seemed like a tomb outside the Go-Go joint.

In the fourth blaring joint the girls wore bell-bottom pants and gyrated in cages. Otherwise there was no way of telling one place from the other. The bartender still wore a beard—same beard, different bartender.

"Sorry," the bartender said, "and keep the five. Don't ask no one else. I know everyone comes in here. I got a photographic memory."

It was dark as Mike Shayne came out of this place.

Ten places later, in Miami now, his feet hurt and his ears were

numb. The next places on his list were all coffee houses—coffee and chess and bearded conversation. It promised some relief for his ears, if not for his feet.

It gave no relief to his search.

No one recognized the face of the elusive and phony Thayer.

Shayne called his office again.

"Nothing yet, Michael," Lucy reported.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe and called Will Gentry. The Chief was not encouraging.

"No one makes the picture here yet, Mike. No word on the car," Gentry said. "The general description of the guy in the pic fits about five possibles: three in Robbery, one a missing witness in a Felony-Homicide, and one hit-and-run. My boys are still on it."

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said.

He did not call Tim Rourke. The elongated reporter would call Lucy as soon as he had anything at all in the way of news.

He went back to his walking.

By two o'clock in the morning he gave up—there was nowhere else open. He drove home and went to bed.

XI

THE TELEPHONE woke him up. He groaned and looked at his clock. It read eight-ten in the morning. The all-night poker game of two nights ago was catching up to him. He reached for the phone.

"Good morning, Michael," the bright voice of Lucy said.

"Is it good, Angel?" Shayne managed to say, his other hand reaching for a cigarette, lighting it.

"I think so. Will Gentry's office called. They've located the car!"

Shayne sat up in bed. "Good! Where and—"

"Right here in Miami. Still had the Arizona plates. It's parked near a motel. They have it staked out, but Sergeant Ward doesn't think that will do any good. The car has been there over two days, the motel owner says, but the driver hasn't been back."

Shayne stubbed out his cigarette. "It figures, Angel. I think my

boy has some experience; he would know the car would be traced sooner or later. But at least I know that my judgment is on the right track. He is in Miami."

Or he was in Miami, Shayne added to himself. But you had to work on your best judgment, and his judgment said that his quarry was still in Miami. So far his judgement was working out nicely. But the finding of the car gave him another area now.

"Angel, check the papers for any ships leaving Miami for Brazil —anywhere else in South or Central America, in the next two days or so."

"Yes, Michael."

"And stay close to the phone today. I'll go back to my rounds, and I'll check in every hour."

"Good luck," Lucy said.

Shayne hung up, thinking that it was not a matter of luck, but that he would locate what he needed today. The finding of the car indicated that while the fake Thayer might have some experience, he was not too bright a criminal. An abandoned car was sure to be noticed, especially since the disappearance from the school would definitely be reported. An experienced man would have hidden the car better, would probably have stolen some Florida license plates soon after driving away with the car in the first place.

Shayne dressed, had his breakfast, and picked up his list. He considered it all the way down to the first of the far less savory places Thayer Edgeworth had favored with his patronage. Places the elder Edgeworth had said he thought Thayer had gone "sometimes" but not regularly. He took Lucy's car and drove to the first address.

He found what he was looking for in the fifth place he visited that morning—a sleazy combination bar and dance hall that featured three bands of varying degrees of agitation and was well known to the police department for everything from simple fights to patronage by known criminals. By the time Shayne reached the place, very simply named Joyland, it was past noon and the first shift was on.

The "sweet" band was playing for six middle-aged men and six girls desperately preserving the facade of youth. The bar was all but deserted. The bar was separated from the dance floor by a wall pierced with only two doors, in deference to the teenagers who frequented the dance hall part. There were no teenagers, and the bartender was bored. He looked at Shayne's picture, and at the redhead's five dollars.

"Sure, I seen this one. Couple of weeks ago, he come in real regular for a while," the bartender said, removing Shayne's money deftly from Shayne's hand.

"Does he have a name?"

"Sure. Pete," the barman said.

"Pete what?"

The barman shrugged. "Just Pete. He said he was twenty-two, I was afraid to ask for identification."

"Meaning he looked younger?"

"What else?"

"You know anyone who'd know his name?"

"For five bucks?" the barman said.

Shayne held out another five. The barman smiled.

"There was a kid hung with him a lot, name of Thayer something. He maybe'll come back. He come in a lot."

Shayne showed the barman Thayer Edgeworth's picture. "This kid?"

"Yeah," the barman said and reached for the five.

Shayne pulled the five back. "You haven't told me anything more yet. I knew about the Thayer kid. Try again."

The barman scratched his armpit. "Well, you might try Susy Perique. She's a nutty kid just about lives in here. If they come in here more than two days running she got to know them."

"Where do I find her?"

"Just sit tight and she'll wiggle in," the barman said and reached for the five again. Shayne let him win the grab.

It was three o'clock, and Shayne was still nursing his third sidecar, when the barman slid up and poked him. He turned to look. A thin blonde all legs and breasts was gyrating alone out on the dance floor through the door. The "Go-Go" band was on.

Shayne motioned to a waiter and gave him the message. Moments later the girl was at his side at the bar. She looked him up and down like a hungry lioness in heat. She looked about fifteen, but her eyes said she knew more than he did about men—from personal experience.

"Drink, Susy?" Shayne said, one eye on the barman to see if he could get away with buying the child a drink. The barman did not bat an eye.

Shayne could have saved himself the worry of buying drinks for a minor. The girl tossed her head, breasts and hips all at once.

"I don't drink or smoke."

"More time for important matters?" Shayne said.

"I like you," the girl said. She touched his face. "My, but you got bones!"

"Tell me about Thayer and Pete?"

The girl shrugged, twitching in some unknown dance step where she stood. "Thayer is a nice boy, rich, too. Pete is a creep. Pete ain't nowhere. Square. I mean, he steals! Who got to steal? I mean, that's so uncool."

"Do you know last names?" Shayne asked casually.

"Sure. Edgeworth and Peterson. Pete Peterson. His real first name is Humphrey! How about that?"

Humphrey "Pete" Peterson! Shayne showed the twitching girl the picture just to be sure. Between finger snaps and hip rolls, she nodded.

"Yeh, that's Pete. What a creep. You move, Red?"

Shayne blinked. "Move?"

"The action, go-go, shake it? Out on the floor, man? Oh, Red, say you ain't square?"

"Cubed," Shayne said. "Sorry about that."

He left the girl twitching her way back out to the dance floor, where a young man found her.

Soon they twitched in unison. Young dreams.

In Lucy's car, Shayne drove straight to Miami Police Headquarters. He went to Gentry's office.

Two hours later Gentry laid the folder out in front of him and leaned back, sucking on his black stogie. The Chief was pleased with his department for once.

"Humphrey 'Pete' Peterson, aged eighteen. Six juvenile arrests. Mostly petty theft, but one stolen car charge and one mugging. Charges dismissed the last two times. Did six months in reform school at fifteen. Joined the Army at seventeen, but it didn't do him much good. Six weeks ago he was described by a witness to a two thousand dollar robbery. He dropped a letter at the scene with his name and address on it—a real clumsy type. Juvenile doesn't have a mug shot on him, of course, but two of the people down there say the pic you brought is Peterson."

"So we know who he is, what he's wanted for, and that he's probably in Miami."

"We'll get him," Gentry said. "You think it's a murder rap now, Mike?"

Shayne nodded. "It sure looks like it, except I can't figure a decent motive. Thayer Edgeworth wasn't even robbed. Peterson couldn't have been worried about staying at the school. He ran away soon after."

"I don't know, Mike. Maybe he needed those two days."

"Or maybe Thayer tried a little blackmail. The dead boy was wild enough, according to his father," Shayne said.

"Well, let's find the kid first and think about the charge later," Gentry said.

Shayne agreed, and left the office. Gentry's men would find the boy, but time was important, and Shayne had some ideas himself. He called Lucy. The brown-eyed girl was excited.

"Michael? Benny Revere called. You're to meet him at the usual place!"

"Right. Do you have a list of ships for me?"

"Yes. There are four. The *Paloma, San Salvador, Eastern Star,* and *Edcuador Trader.*"

"Thanks, Angel."

The detective hung up. He got

into Lucy's car and drove straight to Dunn's Tavern.

XII

IN THE back booth of Dunn's Tavern, Shayne sipped a sidecar and waited. When he heard the light tap, he parted the decorative curtain on the wall beside him. There was a small hole in the wall. On the other side, in a booth of the men's room, Benny Revere could ply his trade in comparative safety. Benny's trade was information.

"Greetings, peeper," a voice said from the tiny hole. "This one is worth about two C's, okay?"

"I'll tell you," Shayne said. He spoke without moving his lips or looking at the curtain.

"Young kid shipping out on the *Tahiti* tonight. Fits your description. Word says he's hot for a robbery job. Officially he's also AWOL from the Army. Name of Humphries, but word says it's a phony. The *Tahiti* is heading for Brazil."

"No deal. No ship named the *Tahiti* is heading that way," Shayne said. "Somebody bum-steered you, Benny."

The voice sighed behind its wall. "You know your work, I know mine. The *Tahiti* ain't listed because its just a coastal schooner! A sailin' ship, Shayne, chartered for a South America scientific cruise. Real smart of the kid. He got himself on as crew."

A sailing schooner, privately chartered! It sounded like a good possibility, and Gentry's men would not tumble for days. The alias Humphries sounded just about right, too. Shayne rolled two hundred-dollar bills into a small cylinder and slipped them through the hole. They vanished.

Shayne got up and left Dunn's. A quick telephone call to Rourke got him the information of just where the *Tahiti* was sailing from. When he heard, he swore softly. It was not going out of Miami. It was leaving from Key Macomber harbor at nine tonight!

Shayne looked at his watch. He could make it with a couple of hours to spare. He drove to his office, left Lucy's car, told her where he was going, and drove south out of the city in his own car.

Key Macomber is a large Key with a small population. Its harbor, on the Gulf side, is deep and sheltered, but for some unknown reason, it never grew as large as Key West. It is used mostly by small commercial fishing boats, and is a haven for charter boats who want to be close to Miami.

Shayne reached there just as the sun set to the west into the open reaches of the Gulf of Mexico. He parked the car some distance from the harbor; it was possible that Peterson might even recognize his car. Certainly the fleeing boy would be alert for anything at all suspicious.

Shayne walked to the harbor.

He had no trouble locating the *Tahiti*. The big three-masted schooner lay at anchor out on the placid water of the harbor—the only schooner anywhere near sea-going size in the harbor. Shayne studied through the binoculars he had the foresight to bring. Its running lights were on, and a light at bow and stern.

A landing stage was set along its starboard side, with a ladder-gangway up.

Nothing moved on the ship. There were few lights, and no movement. It seemed deserted. Shayne checked his watch. It was due to sail in two hours. At the shore-landing where boats would come from the ship, Shayne counted four boats with the name *Tahiti* on them. He estimated that four boats were about all the schooner carried. He smiled. They were all ashore—last fling before sailing.

Only they would not have left the schooner deserted—and he felt pretty sure that Pete Peterson would prefer the seclusion of the anchored ship to the glare of a bon-voyage tavern. He quickly stripped down to his underwear, put his automatic into its water-proof pouch, shoved the pouch inside his underpant waistband, and walked out into the water. Soon he was swimming a slow, silent, but steady side stroke out toward the slowly rocking schooner.

He did not swim to the landing stage: it was possible that anyone on board would be watching the stage. Instead he swam to the stern mooring. Hand over hand he hauled himself up to the rail and over. He dropped silently to the deck. He drew his automatic from its waterproof case, checked it, and moved silently along the deck. He saw no one.

At the first after companionway he stepped softly below. In the dimly lighted passageway he saw doors opening off either side. This would be the quarters of the passengers and officers. He cautiously checked all the cabins and found no one. He came up on deck again and moved to the forward companionway down into the crew's quarters.

He heard a faint noise.

Below someone was playing a radio, very low. Shayne heard a snapping of fingers and a voice singing along with the rock-and-roll beat. Carefully Shayne moved down the gangway into the narrow 'tween-decks passage of the crews quarters. The radio played just ahead behind a slatted door that was closed.

Shayne clicked off the safety on his automatic, stepped to the door and kicked it in.

The man was lying on a bottom bunk in a row of bunks. He was on his back with his hands comfortably behind his head. The radio was a small transistor resting on his stomach. A man at his ease—until Shayne kicked the door open.

Then he was up on his feet like a cat.

The transistor clattered to the floor and skidded across the room.

The man facing Shayne was only a boy. He reached for something under the mattress of the bunk, saw Shayne's automatic, and stopped. The color drained from his face. He looked like he was about to cry.

"An hour," the boy said. "Just an hour."

Shayne shook his head. "No, Peterson, not an hour. Forever. You'd have to run forever. Even Brazil wouldn't hide you. It just doesn't work that easy. Not on a murder charge."

The boy blinked, his mouth open. "Murder? No! Hell, no! I didn't kill him!"

"Save it for the police. Now let's us get out of here, okay?"

"No! I didn't—"

"You can tell me the story on our way back to Miami," Shayne said. "Now let's move before anyone comes back. I don't feel like explanations."

The boy just stared. "How? How'd you find me? I mean, I had it all fixed? You couldn't find me!"

"Kid, you never had a chance once you ran from St. Edmunds. Don't you know a man on the run never has a chance? It's all against you. If I hadn't found you, the police would have."

"Another hour!" the boy said.

"No, you were never free, just misplaced for a while. Let's go now."

"I didn't kill him," the boy said.

"Tell me about it while we drive," Shayne said.

On deck they stood above the landing stage. The boy looked down. He was carrying his radio. Shayne had the cheap pistol that had been hidden under the bunk. The boy shrugged and nodded toward the water.

"No boat."

"You can swim. Just stay ahead of me."

Shayne swam behind the boy until they reached the shore. When they came up on the beach, Shayne dried himself with the towel he had made the boy carry from the boat. The boy had swum ahead of Shayne with the towel and his clothes held above the water in one hand while he swam with the other hand.

They both dried and dressed and Shayne followed the boy to his car. He drove off toward the north and Miami.

"Okay, now tell me your story," Shayne said.

The boy shrugged. "I was on the run, you know? I met this kid, Thayer, and it was him got the idea. I mean, who'd look for me at St. Edmunds? It was a good idea."

The boy talked on. As Shayne listened his grey eyes grew harder and harder. His foot pressed heavier on the gas pedal. When they reached Miami Shayne did not

stop. He did not even slow down. He drove straight on along the express highway toward the north and west.

He drove toward Marimba Beach. He stopped only once, north of Miami, to call Lieutenant Bob Edwards, and to call Lucy in his office. He told Lucy to get Roderick Edgeworth back to Marimba Beach.

Then he asked the boy to repeat his story once more, and listened grimly all the way along in the dark night.

XIII

"I DIDN'T even know he was dead," the boy said in the car. "I mean, not until I read it in the paper yesterday. I just got scared and figured I had to run, see?"

"From the beginning," Shayne said, his grey eyes fixed ahead on the dark highway that glared almost white in his headlights.

"Like I said, I was AWOL, and I knew I'd dropped that damn letter when I pulled the robbery. So I didn't go back to my place. I figured I'd be safer in a crowd, see? I mean, mixing with all them kids at Joyland. I met this Thayer right away. He was a real wild kid. I mean, he was trying to act real big. I don't know how I got started, but I told him all about what I'd done and how the fuzz was after me."

The Peterson boy laughed and lit a cigarette. "He was sure one crazy kid. He got this idea right away. He told me about his old man sending him off to this school to get rid of him. He said we looked kind of alike, and I should go to school as him while he stayed in Marimba Beach. He said I'd be safe as a judge, and he'd have himself a ball. Only it wasn't that—the ball he'd have, I mean. It was like he thought the idea was a real killer, you know. I mean, the whole idea made him laugh like hell."

They were in the center of the state now, far from both coasts, and the low lying land was flat and ghostly in the night as the beams of the headlights swept ahead.

"So we went up to Marimba Beach together. He took that place in town, and I showed up at the school. It was easy, like Thayer said it would be. I mean, that major he didn't know just what Thayer looked like. I fitted the bill good. I knew enough about Thayer to pull it off. He said he knew his old man, or his brothers, wouldn't show up for months, maybe never. They was all too busy.

"Anyhow, I saw right off I better stay kind of quiet and keep my mouth shut. I mean, I wasn't just like those other kids, you know? I figured I'd lay low about a month up there at the school, then cut out for somewhere safe after the heat was off. I stayed away from those creep kids, and I played it real close and cool with the teachers like I was back in reform school.

You know, do all they tell you, and keep your nose clean and your mouth shut—but watch them, see?"

Shayne watched the road. Now he realized what the description of the boy given to him by the teachers had sounded like—a smart young con in a jail. "Yeah, I see. All right, so there you were safe in St. Edmunds, and there was Thayer Edgeworth having a ball down in Marimba Beach. Incidentally, who paid who?"

"Nobody paid no one. I let the kid have some of the two grand for spending, that's all," Peterson said.

"All right. Like I said, Peterson, you were safe and Thayer was having a circus. What happened?"

The boy was silent for a time. Shayne drove on across the state, passing the small, dreary inland towns in the dark night. Finally the boy sighed and shrugged and swore all at once.

He was, obviously, swearing at himself.

"I got greedy," Peterson said. "I tried to make a score. I mean, there he was, and I knew it, so I figured I'd put the bite on. Only—"

"The bite?"

"You know, a little cash. I mean, I figured I'd make it south of the border, you know, so a little more cash would grease the road."

"Who? There who was?" Shayne said.

"Miller," the boy said. "Sergeant Joe Miller, the Monster of MacGruder. I spotted him right off. Nobody who was ever in Camp MacGruder was ever gonna forget the Monster. I mean, like he was the worst. A real killer-fink. Only they caught up with him while I was doing my basic a year and a half ago, and they booted him out. He got off light, just getting booted and a dishonorable."

"What did he do?"

"Lost ten kids in a swamp on a night march. The kids yelled for help, only Monster Miller didn't help. He told everyone the yellow kids was always screamin'. He said he'd make men out of 'em. Six never got out of that swamp, and four had to be psychoed in a hospital for months. All the Monster got was a slap."

"Where did you spot him?" Shayne asked.

"Where?" Peterson blinked. "Hell, at the school, of course. Yeah, right at St. Edmunds. I knew him right off, and I knew he must of faked his papers and all and got a job there. I figured I could make a quick killing before I took my run. Only I got scared when he didn't show for the pay-off. I figured maybe he'd got the word on me, and that put me out on a bigger limb than he was. I mean, I guess I was stupid to make a squeeze-play when I was so hot myself."

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe with his left hand. His grey eyes had become points of steel.

"There isn't any Miller at St. Edmunds."

"Miller? Hell, he didn't keep his right name. He faked his papers, I guess."

"Who?"

"Maple, of course. *Captain* Maple. Captain my smelly foot! He couldn't be captain of a rock pile. Kicked out, that's what he was. A huge joke! The Monster of MacGruder!"

Shayne slowly let his breath out. Captain Maple! Blackmail! A strange suspicion was developing in his brain.

"Tell me exactly what happened," Shayne said.

"Like I said, I spotted him. Not right away, you know. I mean, I knew I remembered him from somewhere, but I wasn't so sure where. Then after a week it come to me. I had the bastard! So I kind of talked to him, see? He knew I had him. He said not to talk at school. I said he should pay me one thousand dollars, that's all I figured I could get considerin' his salary at that crummy school.

"Anyway, we agreed to meet in Marimba Beach that Saturday. We was to meet at a motel. I was there, only he never showed. I was mad at first, I figured I'd blow the whistle. Only when I got back to school I saw him and I got scared. I mean, he looked real wild, real mean, and he just sort of stared at me. I figured he'd spotted *me!*

"I figured I better get out of there. I decided to wait for Monday and hit the major's office. Only all day Sunday I saw him watching me, just watching! I swear I thought he was gonna jump me. So Monday I hit the safe and made it out. Only—"

"Only what?" Shayne snapped, his mind racing.

"He did jump me. He was outside the main building of the school. Man, it's lucky I was ready. He had his gun out and he'd of got me sure only I was ready. I saw him waiting, and I sneaked up and sapped him with a pipe I had. Then I went under the fence in a place the kids dug out, and grabbed the car I borrowed and had waiting. I drove down to Miami and got passage on the *Tahiti.* I didn't know nothing about the Edgeworth kid until I was in Miami—I swear it!"

For a time Shayne drove in silence. They were close to Marimba Beach now, and the gaunt redhead was thinking. He still could not rule out Peterson as the killer of Thayer Edgeworth, but all along he had wondered about a motive for Peterson, and now the kid seemed to have even less—unless he was lying all the way, which was of course possible.

There was still Tiny Cavendish or either of the girls in Marimba Beach. They were both after Thayer.

He could not see Sally Rozman killing anyone for love, but Thayer

had a lot of money. Still, she wouldn't kill the golden goose. On the other hand, she could have paid some muscle boy to rough him up for playing with another girl, and the muscle boy hit too hard.

And there was now Captain Maple. But why would the giant ex-soldier kill Thayer? Thayer knew nothing about him, and Maple knew nothing about Thayer! Maple didn't even know Thayer, the real Thayer, existed! And Shayne tugged harder on his ear. Maybe that was the answer right there!

"You say you were to meet Maple in a motel?" Shayne snapped.

"Yeah," Peterson said.

"For sure?"

"No, hold it. If he couldn't make it he was gonna call. I told him I'd be at the motel, at the Pink Onion Bar, or at the drugstore."

"Gulf Pharmacy?"

"Yeh," Peterson said. "Only he never called. So I went to the motel. He didn't show. And I got real scared."

Shayne nodded. They were entering Marimba Beach. Shayne made two stops, The Gulf Pharmacy and the Pink Onion Bar. He left Peterson handcuffed in the car. After those two stops, he drove to State police headquarters. Lieutenant Edwards was waiting. He listened to Shayne's information. Then the two men, and their prisoner, and two of Edwards' troopers, drove fast for St. Edmunds Academy.

XIV

IN THE austere office of Major Granger they all sat on the hard wooden chairs and looked at Shayne and Edwards. Peterson sat and smoked a cigarette, his bravado back now that he was caught with no way out.

Major Granger watched the boy. The face of the headmaster said clearly that he wished he had had a chance to work on Peterson. He would have made a better man of him. Captain Maple also watched Peterson, but his face showed something else.

"You rotten punk," Maple said. "Why did you kill him? Found you out? You'd do anything to save your filthy hide!"

Enrique Escudo sat beside Burley, both men acting confused by it all. Confused, but also with pity on their faces for the Peterson boy.

"A bad start. It is a sad thing," Escudo said.

"He probably never had a chance, and the Edgeworth boy had it all," Burley said.

Roderick Edgeworth, who had been at the school when they arrived, shook his head. He seemed to be in the midst of an internal battle. Hatred for the Peterson boy, who he felt had killed his son, battled with guilt that it was, in the end, his own fault that his son had ever met the Peterson boy.

"No," Edgeworth said. "Thayer didn't have it all. He had money.

He didn't have a father. He didn't have a home, guidance. I guess I did it. I don't know why this boy killed my son, but I imagine Thayer gave him a reason."

Major Granger looked at Shayne. "Blackmail, Shayne?"

Shayne nodded.

Captain Maple snorted. "That's no excuse for this punk killing Thayer!"

Shayne rubbed his chin and watched the captain. "Really? You don't think blackmail is a motive for killing? I wonder. I wonder if Sergeant Miller would agree with you?"

The big captain stood up slowly. His hulking form loomed tall and bulky. He then looked at Peterson.

"You had to talk? Why? You had to tell? For what? It can't help you now? Why?" Maple said to the boy.

"I ain't taking no murder rap," Peterson said.

In the room, now, they all stared in confusion. Everyone was looking from Maple to the Peterson boy. All except Roderick Edgeworth. The father was staring only at Shayne.

"You mean Peterson didn't—" Edgeworth began.

Shayne held up his hand. He stopped Edgeworth. He was watching Captain Maple.

"You admit it, Maple?" Shayne said. "You admit that you are really ex-Sergeant Miller of Camp MacGruder? That your papers as Captain Maple are all faked?"

Now they all looked at Maple. Major Granger had risen from his seat behind his desk, his stern face red with suffused anger. Maple looked at Granger once; then the big man shrugged.

"You'd find out in a day once that punk told you what to look for. Yeah, I'm Sergeant Miller. I got a raw deal, you hear? I was the best instructor they had at MacGruder. I made those punk kids into men, into soldiers! One lousy mistake and they crucified me! What could I do? I was an instructor, a soldier. So I faked papers. I could do it; I had friends all over the service. Then I applied down here, out of the way. But this dumb AWOL punk had to come here!"

"So he blackmailed you?" Edwards said.

"He tried," Maple smiled cruelly. "But I guess he got cold feet, a punk like him."

"You admit it?" Shayne said. "Are you going to admit that you killed Thayer Edgeworth?"

Maple laughed out loud. "Hell, Shayne, are you crazy? Me? Why would I kill Thayer? How? I didn't even know he was around. I thought this punk kid was Thayer Edgeworth! You know that!"

Major Granger nodded. "He's right, Shayne. I don't see how he could have known the Edgeworth boy was in Marimba Beach."

Burley looked puzzled. "I suppose when Peterson blackmailed him, he knew Peterson was a ringer. But he still wouldn't know where the real Thayer was, not unless Peterson told him."

"Also," Escudo said. "If by chance he did know where the real Thayer was, why would he kill him? Thayer did not know who Maple really was."

Shayne had listened to them all. Now he shrugged. "Peterson could have told Thayer. They could have been in it together."

"But they weren't, Shayne," Maple said. "Ask Peterson about that. He can't say they were in it together. I didn't know there was a real Thayer Edgeworth anywhere. I had no reason to think this punk wasn't Edgeworth."

Shayne nodded, smiled. He smiled straight at the hulking form of the Monster of MacGruder. When Shayne spoke, his voice was low but as hard as steel.

"No, you couldn't know there were two Thayers. That's why you killed Thayer Edgeworth!"

In the silence, Shayne continued to stare at the big captain. Maple did not flinch. A sneer slowly spread over his face as Shayne began to talk.

"The way I see it is really simple. You made a mistake. You arranged to meet Peterson for the payoff at a motel in town. Only you had no intention of paying. You planned to kill Peterson, or at least scare him off. Only after you arranged for the motel meet, you changed the place of meeting.

"I figure you realized that a motel was a pretty public place. I also figure you had it planned in advance. That was why you arranged a way to get in touch with Peterson, or Thayer Edgeworth, which is the only name you knew him under. Peterson says you never changed the meeting from the motel, but you didn't show up. That's what tipped me off. *You didn't show up because you had changed the meeting.*"

Shayne looked around at all the faces. "You changed it with a call to the Gulf Pharmacy. The owner says you called and talked to Thayer Edgeworth. You asked him to meet at the school! He agreed. He came to the school. Only what you didn't know until he showed up was that you had talked to the real Thayer Edgeworth!"

Shayne laughed a hard laugh. "You asked the druggist to put Thayer Edgeworth on the telephone, but the druggist only knew the real Thayer! You see, in town Thayer used his right name! So the real Thayer came out to the school, scared because he thought the switch had been found out by the school, and the Peterson kid here went to the motel where you never showed. You must have been really shocked when you saw you had killed the wrong boy.

What happened, Maple? Did you kill him before you even really saw him?"

Roderick Edgeworth groaned aloud, jumped up, started for the big man before anyone could stop him. "You dirty—"

Maple knocked Edgeworth half way across the room and flat to the floor in a single massive punch. The ex-sergeant raged.

"You can't prove anything! I didn't kill anyone!"

"The drugstore owner will swear you called, talked to the real Thayer, and that the real Thayer told him that he was going out to the school."

"But I never saw him! You can't prove I did!" Maple yelled.

Shayne nodded to Edwards. The lieutenant went to the office door and opened it. A state trooper came in.

He carried a small bottle. Shayne looked at Maple.

"Killers always make some stupid mistake, Maple. Or I better call you Miller, eh?"

Maple, or Miller, stared at the bottle in the trooper's hand. The big man seemed puzzled.

"You see, when the druggist heard that Thayer was coming out to the school, he asked him to deliver a package. The package was a prescription, Maple. It was a prescription for you! Tranquillizers. You take them regularly, the druggist tells us.

"The police didn't find the package on Thayer's body, in his house, or in his car."

Shayne sighed. "I had a hunch. A man who needs barbiturates, and who has just killed someone, and who is being blackmailed, could easily forget how dangerous that prescription was—especially since he did not know who he had killed!

"You made that mistake, Miller. You kept the prescription. We found it, with witnesses, in your medicine cabinet just now! *A bottle of pills only Thayer Edgeworth could have given to you, and on the night he died!*"

Roderick Edgeworth, helped to his seat, groaned now like a wounded lion. Escudo and Burley stared at Maple. Major Granger, on his feet, swore a stream of oaths, and looked as if he would like to get his hands on Maple. Maple himself just stood there for a long minute.

Then he sat down heavily.

"He came into the common room," Maple said, his voice flat, dead. "He gave me the package. I hardly remember that. I guess I put the pills in my pocket. I saw he wasn't Thayer, not the one who I thought was Thayer Edgeworth. I went crazy.

"Two of them! Two of them knew about me! I accused him of being a dirty blackmailer. He denied it. But he laughed, said maybe it was a good idea.

"I went crazy. I hit him! I hit

him two, three times! The last time he didn't get up. I—I guess I hit too hard. I just hated his face. I hit him and he went down and hit his head on the edge of a filing cabinet in the common room. He was dead!"

The big ex-sergeant looked up at them all. "He was dead. And I didn't know who he was. I carried him out to his car. His name and address was on the registration: John Roderick, an address in Marimba Beach. So I drove him back to the alley behind the house and left his body in the trunk. I felt safe. I didn't know him. He couldn't be traced to me. So I left him. I watched the punk I thought was Thayer Edgeworth, but he seemed scared. Then he ran away. I was sure I was okay until Shayne showed up. I still felt okay until I saw the body you said was Thayer Edgeworth. Then I knew what had happened."

The hulking man looked up, smiled weakly. "I forgot all about those pills."

Edwards nodded to his troopers. They came and took the big man out. Burley and Escudo were holding Roderick Edgeworth.

It was noon before Mike Shayne finished his report in the office of Lieutenant Bob Edwards. He signed the report. Edwards was looking out the window.

"He gave us a full statement. We can't get Murder One. Maybe Murder Two or Manslaughter One. He'll go away for a while," Edwards said.

"Too bad the army didn't put him away. This might never have happened," Shayne said. "He has an uncontrollable temper. He likes to hit people. The army knew that."

"Too bad Granger doesn't screen his students better," Edwards said.

"He will now, pictures in advance," Shayne said. "What about the Peterson kid?"

"Miami gets him, then maybe the Army. Gentry has a good robbery case, so the army won't press t' e AWOL."

"Maybe he'll learn," Shayne said.

"I doubt it," Edwards said. The lieutenant looked at Mike Shayne.

"I still don't get one thing, Mike. Why did Thayer suggest such a stupid trick as switching places with Peterson?"

Shayne shrugged. "Kicks, Bob. Just kicks, Peterson says. The thrill of it—sending a wanted man to St. Edmunds.

"Peterson says Thayer said it was the best kick he'd ever had. A real thrill."

"Kicks can cost a lot," Edwards said.

"Yeah, a lot," Shayne said soberly.

He went out to his car and started the long drive back across the state to Miami.

THE RANSACKED ROOM

A New Lucius Leffing Story

by JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN

They were only little toy soldiers—yet more deadly by far than the real thing!

I WAS SITTING with my investigator friend, Lucius Leffing, in his Victorian living room, when he picked up a newspaper clipping.

"What do you make of this?"

he asked, handing me the excerpt.

The clipping, in a few brief paragraphs, revealed that a house on Harbor Street had been broken into and that a child's room had been ransacked. Nothing had been stolen or damaged, however, and no other rooms of the house appeared to have been disturbed.

"It makes absolutely no sense to me," I said, handing back the clipping.

Leffing glanced at the brief article thoughtfully. "For some reason this little matter intrigues me. Probably for the very reason that it appears to make no sense!"

I glanced at my watch and got up. "I admit there have been few rewarding cases recently, Leffing, but I think you are scraping the bottom of the barrel with this sort of thing!"

Leffing settled back comfortably in his favorite Morris chair. "You may be right, Brennan, you may be right. Nevertheless, I shall just look into the matter for my own amusement!"

"Keep me informed," I told him as I left.

When I saw him again, several days later, I mentioned the newspaper clipping.

"Any progress?" I inquired.

He shook his head. "Absolutely none. I had the temerity to interview the house owner on Harbor Street. He could only repeat that nothing had been stolen."

I said, "It looks to me that it was just a childish episode of some sort. Perhaps a playmate of the kid on Harbor Street broke into the house to take some treasured toy which he had seen around the premises."

"All the toys of Willie Healy—the boy whose room was ransacked—were in the room when it was broken into. None was taken; none was damaged. Mr. Healy, moreover, was quite sure that the boy had been given no new toys for months; nothing else had been added to the room either.

"I questioned him carefully on those points."

"Have to put it down to aimless juvenile vandalism," I said with a shrug. "Heaven knows there's plenty of it these days."

"Doesn't it strike you as odd that juvenile vandals would confine their activities to only one room and that although the room was left in considerable disarray, nothing was actually damaged?"

I admitted that it did strike me as odd, but I added rather unkindly that the whole business bored me and that I wished Leffing would get onto something more exciting.

"Nothing promising shows on my horizon," my friend replied, "and so I think that I will just amuse myself with this little problem for the moment."

He telephoned me two days later to ask if I would like to accompany him on a visit to a toy shop. Not wanting to miss anything, I assented, but I arrived at seven

Autumn Street in a state of complete mystification.

Leffing sprawled back in his favorite Victorian Morris chair. "Yesterday Mr. Healy telephoned me. He said that the item he called about seemed so trivial he hesitated to disturb me, but he remembered that I had asked him if he had bought any new toys for his son recently. He repeated that he had not, but he suddenly recalled that he had bought a set of toy soldiers for a neighborhood newsboy only a few days prior to the ransacking of his own son's room. His son, Willie, had told him that the newsboy collected toy soldiers and since it was the boy's birthday, Mr. Healy had decided to buy him a little gift in return for various small favors."

"In other words," I said, "you now think that Willie Healy's room was searched by someone who believed that Mr. Healy had bought the toy soldiers for his own son?"

Leffing nodded. "Exactly so. If you are ready, perhaps we can now drive out for a visit to the toy shop where Mr. Healy made his purchase."

I said no more till we were halfway across town. Then I suddenly turned to Leffing. "But it still makes no sense! Why would anyone risk a breaking and entering charge for such a trivial thing? Toy soldiers can't be worth more than a few cents apiece and they can easily be procured at any toy store."

"As I said before," Leffing said, "the very fact that nothing in this business appears to make any sense is the reason I find it of interest." He glanced ahead and nodded. "If I am not mistaken, there is the toy store halfway down this block. Not a particularly inviting area, is it?"

The neighborhood was dingy. Most of the shop windows were dim with dust; the sidewalks were littered; the houses had seen most of their paint peel and flake away with the passage of time.

The Toy Bazaar, our particular target, was maintained a bit better than some of its neighbors, but even so it did not present the appearance of an enterprising retail establishment.

A bell tinkled as we entered. Almost immediately a very fat man wearing shapeless grey trousers and an oddly-contrasting maroon-colored vest made his way toward the front of the shop. He had an elastic step despite his bulk.

"Can I help you gentlemen?" His puffy eyes scrutinized us sharply.

"I understand that you have

various sets of toy soldiers for sale," Leffing said. "My little nephew collects them and he has a birthday coming up."

The fat man nodded enthusiastically. "One of our best-moving items. 'Soldiers Down the Centuries' the sets are called. The young folks go wild about them. Right over here."

Set out on a counter toward the rear of the store were about twenty boxed groups of toy soldiers, ten or twenty to a box. There were Americans in the khaki of World War I, Confederates in grey, Roman soldiers with shield and sword, Vikings with spear and mace.

"Only one dollar for a set of ten, or one eighty-five for a set of twenty," the shopkeeper informed us. "All exact replicas and hand-painted."

"Quite colorful, I must admit," Leffing murmured. "Well, just give me three sets of ten each. Let me see. I think Romans, Vikings and a set of the American Indians would do. They seem to be the fiercest-looking!"

Our host nodded amiably. "Hours of fun for the youngsters there! Absolutely fascinating they find them!"

The sets were wrapped and paid for and our stout friend bid us a pleasant good-day. As we left the shop, I felt that his eyes were still on us but I did not turn around.

"Autumn Street?" I inquired as I started the car.

Leffing shook his head. "Not yet, Brennan. If you would be kind enough to drive to seventeen Marlington Street, I may be fortunate enough to arrange a trade."

"A trade?"

"Yes, of course. These three sets I have just purchased are of no interest to us. We want the set that was given as a gift to the newspaper delivery boy! Mr. Healy gave me the boy's name and address.

Marlington Street was on the edge of a teeming slum area. I parked the car and we went up the steps of number seventeen, a six-story down-at-heels tenement. The newsboy's name, Leffing told me, was Johnny Vilagon. We rang a bell labeled "Vilagon, J. S." and waited.

A shrill female voice called from the top of a stairwell. "Who is it. What you want?"

"We'd like to see Johnny for a moment, if we may," Leffing replied, starting up the stairs.

A tired-looking, dark-haired woman appeared at the stairhead. "Johnny in trouble?"

Assuming his most affable manner, Leffing explained that the set of toy soldiers given to Johnny were supposed to be held at the store for him, but that they had been sold to Mr. Healy by mistake. He was collecting them for his young nephew, Leffing explained, and that particular set given to Johnny was the very one that his little nephew needed to

round out his collection. He wondered if Johnny would be willing to make a trade, his one set for three new sets.

Just then a young cyclone came whirling up the stairs. Johnny, an intelligent-looking lad with enormous brown eyes, listened to the proposed transaction with bewilderment. As he hesitated, Leffing opened his parcel and showed him the three sets of soldiers, the Vikings with their horned helmets, the Romans with sword and shield, the Indians with hatchet and knife.

Johnny's big eyes looked their disbelief. "All those for my one old set of pirates?"

Leffing nodded. "All three for your one."

Five minutes later we were walking down the stairs with Johnny's set of pirate soldiers tucked under Leffing's arm. Mrs. Vilagon and Johnny stood at the top of the stairs regarding us with puzzlement, not sure, I felt, whether we were playing Santa Claus or were just plain crazy.

As we drove back toward Autumn Street, Leffing favored me with a brief discourse on toy soldiers, explaining that in his day they were made of solid lead or even iron but that now they were nearly all made of cheap alloys and were left hollow. He admitted, however, that the modern toy soldiers were more realistic-looking.

Set out on one of Leffing's marble-topped Victorian tables, the ten toy pirates, wielding cutlass and dagger, were colorful and eye-catching, but I could see nothing at all unusual about them.

"What now?" I inquired.

"I will be back in a moment," Leffing said. He descended to the cellar and shortly reappeared with a thick slab of wood and a hammer.

As I watched with rising curiosity, he sat down, placed the slab between his knees and picked up one of the toy pirates.

"We will just execute one of these seafaring marauders," he said, "and see what we shall find."

Placing the luckless pirate on the slab, he gave it a sharp rap with the hammer.

The little toy figure crumbled under the blow. A white powdery substance spilled out onto the wooden slab.

"What is it?" I asked in astonishment.

"Cannot you guess?" Leffing asked. "I have no doubt that it is a product of the poppy. Our well-fleshed friend at the Toy Bazaar is obviously a narcotics distributor, perhaps the chief one in this area."

"Good heavens! What put you on to it?"

Leffing shrugged. "My good Brennan, why would anyone take the trouble to ransack a child's room unless he had a reason? Nothing was stolen, nothing damaged. There had to be a reason!"

He settled back in his chair. "I followed a hunch, of course. I was never sure. After Mr. Healy informed me about the toy soldiers, I made some inquiries. The Toy Bazaar, I learned, was located in a section which was not likely to support a toy store. I felt that it might very well be a front for some illegal operation.

"Then I learned, by telephoning a wholesale toy distributor, that the toy soldiers were manufactured in Hong Kong. The puzzle fell into shape. No one would break into a house in order to recover a dollar set of toy soldiers unless those soldiers concealed something else. Heroin seemed the most likely item. As it happens, I was right."

Leffing turned his information over to the proper authorities and as a consequence the next shipment of toy soldiers destined for The Toy Bazaar was confiscated after delivery. Approximately one third of the hollow little men were packed with the white powder of delicious dreams and lingering death. Upon arrest, our pudgy friend in the maroon-colored vest, Berthold Ruvany, proved to be one of the chief dope distributors on the East Coast.

"I still don't see," I said, "how Ruvany knew which shipments of soldiers to break open for dope and which to sell."

"Simplicity itself," Leffing answered. "After each shipment left Hong Kong, Ruvany was probably sent a word in code, such as 'Confederate' or 'Roman'. That would mean that all the Confederate or Roman soldiers in the current shipment were packed with heroin. Through someone's carelessness, one set of soldiers filled with the powder, the pirate set, was put out for sale.

"Possibly someone in Hong Kong filled the set by mistake, or included it in the wrong shipment and Ruvany was informed only after the set was sold."

He sipped his cognac. "Ruvany undoubtedly sent a paid hireling to search for the toy pirates. And that is what comes of depending on someone else. Not finding what he was searching for after ransacking the room, the fellow simply departed. A more intelligent underling would have stolen something to make the invasion appear a routine burglary.

"If that had been done, the newspaper account would never have intrigued me. I would have glanced at it and dismissed it. The fact that the ransacking appeared so senseless focused my attention on it. And that was Ruvany's undoing!"

I nodded. "He will be out of circulation for an indefinite time, I trust."

Leffing frowned. "It would appear so—and yet I have a hunch that we have not heard the last of Berthold Ruvany!"

A Novelet of Mounting Terror

THEY MET FOR MURDER

by JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT

She was made for the giving of life, he for the taking of it. And one night, alone with her in a deserted house, he looked at his knife and smiled. The moment had come . . .

MOLLY MAGOWAN and Lloyd Gleason, the newspapers pointed out after the murder, had little in common, except that they had been born the same year, 1944, at the only hospital in Port Campbell, and less than two days apart.

Their fathers had been overseas; and it was the custom at Saint Jude's Hospital to attach little American flags to the bassinets of progeny of men fighting for their country.

That was during the reign of the amazon, Sister Mary Adolphine, who always had been over-organized—the infant boys segregated from the infant girls, so that if their few-day-old eyes had been able to focus, the males would have pondered the statue of Saint Joseph, while the females would have seen one of the Blessed Virgin.

Within the first circle of segregation, there was another. Ward infants were separated from semi-private infants, who in turn were kept out of breathing distance from private-room babies.

Since Lloyd Gleason's mother was in a private room, he was in

the first row of babies on the left side of the nursery, while Molly Magowan's bassinet was in the last row from the right, her mother up in the over-crowded ward with a screen around her bed, in case she stopped dying long enough to be bothered by the chatter of the healthy women, who were anxious to get on with the job of living.

Molly Magowan and Lloyd Gleason would in the course of the next twenty-two years wander far from Port Campbell, until on the evening of February 1, 1966, they met for murder.

ON murder-minus-twenty, Molly awakened from fitful nightmares just as the feeble January sun broke across Capitol Hill, a lone ray bouncing off the window sill of the room she shared with Edna Morgan on a street behind the U.S. Supreme Court.

Her eyes contained some of the tears shed a few hours ago as she slipped out of bed, looking around for her robe, until she remembered she already had packed it. She walked into the adjoining bathroom, applying a tissue to her swollen eyes.

"Good morning!" Edna called from the other bed.

"At least you'll get a night's sleep when I'm gone, Edna, my darling."

"Feel better this morning, Molly?"

Molly tossed the tissue into the handsome gold-and-white receptacle. "I'll be all right, Edna."

"I wish you'd reconsider, Molly. Running away from him's no answer."

Molly stared into the tinted mirror over the sink. She was a wistful Celt, ebony-haired, small-boned, a dark Rosaleen that poets would have sung about in better days.

There was a spontaneous vivaciousness, not only in her violet-hued eyes and the cut of her mouth, but in the quick yet careful movements she brought to everything she did: a graceful sweep to her arms, an American concern for looking neat, wholesome, utterly feminine.

She was brushing her teeth vigorously, as Edna ran off at the mouth about Florence Crittenden homes, and the advisability of leaving an illegitimate baby behind for adoption.

"I couldn't give my own child away," Molly said matter-of-factly as she swished her pink negligee behind her and padded across the bedroom.

It was one of those times when big, unattractive Edna's devil tried to remind her that girls as pretty as Molly should have to pay the piper this way. The problem was, as Edna often said, "You can't but help like Molly. She's sweet, unselfish, a square-shooter."

"But Molly, I can't see you going home in your condition! You've told me your father drinks a lot,

that he thought nothing of knocking you around—"

Molly was brushing her hair; and in the vanity mirror, she saw that Edna's concern was genuine. "Isn't home the place where they have to take you in when you have no other place to go?"

"Your old man's going to blow his top!"

Molly sighed. "Well, he's been wanting me to come home and help him nurse his mother. She's over eighty now."

"Molly! Most small town girls run away to the big city when they're in a fix. You—you go home to Virginia. Face up to it. In the eyes of your family, you've done the unpardonable."

"And in my own eyes, Edna. It was stupid, illogical—sinful."

Edna's florid face broke up. "You were in love with him, kid."

"Were? I'm the kind that love doesn't stop for, Edna. I've got to get out of Washington, away from Brett. When I'm with him, I listen to everything he says. I want to do just as he suggests. But not murder!"

"Don't forget to pack your crucifix, Molly."

Molly looked up to where the crucifix was hanging over her bed. She let a cigarette. Watching a spiral of smoke rise, she said: "No, I mustn't forget to pack my crucifix."

Edna said she'd make a pot of coffee and Molly thought she could get coffee at the bus station. But she followed Edna into the kitchen, and while Edna put the kettle on the gas jet, Molly opened a can of frozen orange juice.

"I wish you'd stay here," Edna said, plopping her big frame into a chair at the table. "Go on working until it really shows. Why should Brett have everything his way?"

Molly stubbed her cigarette out. "He's not having his way. You can imagine Brett's way at a time like this." Her body seemed to shiver. "But I couldn't do like he wants."

Edna cursed. "You should have murdered that liar when he admitted he was married."

"Brett never lied to me, Edna. Not really. It was I who lied to myself. In the beginning, I must have suspected that a man of thirty, as handsome as Brett, would have a wife."

"Men should be forced to wear wedding rings," Edna said. "For the worst chatterbox in the Navy, he was careful not to tell you that he was married."

"He told me wonderful things, Edna." She walked to the window and glanced out on leafless trees. "That he had missed talking to American girls like me while he was off Viet Nam. He told me I was lovely, that I smelled good, that my laughter was infectious. That he had been flying an A-4 Skyhawk-jet-attacker from off a nuclear carrier.

"He told me I played a good game of tennis and he intended to

help me improve. That he liked vodka, Dylan Thomas poetry, girls in summer dresses. He told me he had nothing to do that evening, that his apartment mate was on a cross country hop. He told me that he was falling in love with me—"

"All hog wash," Edna said emphatically.

"No. Things to remember a lifetime, Edna." Molly glanced at the orange juice distastefully, putting her glass on the table. She sat down, resting her face against the palm of her hand. "The next morning, he told me that I was the sweetest girl he had ever been with; he cried because I had been a virgin."

Edna was crying now. "But the rat had no picture of his wife around that apartment, did he? No, he had locked it up in his foot locker, I'll bet, before going off to play tennis. Tennis my eye! He was prowling that day, looking for a sweet kid like you."

"I didn't have to go home with him, Edna. Not after a three-hour acquaintance. Something about me must have told him that I was a swinger, that I'd be sophisticated enough to take care of myself. What bothers me, Edna, is the way I didn't know myself until that evening. There never was a day in my life when I believed anything like that could happen to me."

Edna flicked off the gas under the kettle. "What you're saying is that we never really know what we're capable of."

"That's it, Edna. We go along saying, 'I could never do this,' or 'I could never do that,' and then a night comes when we find that we sure as hell can do just that—"

Edna measured instant coffee into two mugs. "Maybe, kid. I don't know anything about these things, like men. I'm twenty-six and I weigh two-hundred pounds. I've never had a boyfriend. But why would I over-eat defensively to keep men away, like Cynthia says, since I don't know anything about men?

"I mean I loved my father; he was a nice quiet little man, who never once slapped me. I love all nine of my brothers. And yet I eat and eat and eat. And you're the best cook I've ever lived with . . ."

Molly didn't hear anything Edna was saying. She took one sip of coffee and knew that it would gag her. "Oh, Edna, I wish I could find a hole, crawl in, and pull it in after me—"

But in truth, suicide was outside her scope; and it would be another twenty days before the desired escape to eternity would open for her. The instrument offering this release would walk and talk like a man. His name would be Lloyd Gleason and his compulsion would be murder.

ON THE MURDER-MINUS-fifteen, Lloyd Gleason awakened with a scream lodged in his throat.

He heard his mother's voice before otherwise becoming aware that she was at the door of his room; and when she said, "Lloyd," all the muscles in his body knotted hard.

"Darling, it happens to be Monday, January seventeenth. You were due back on the campus two weeks ago."

Perspiration had left his pajamas wet and uncomfortable. The scream seemed to have wadded itself up in saliva in his mouth and it was choking him.

Mrs. Murphy—she had married Murphy a few years after Lloyd's father was killed in the fighting around Liege—pulled out a swival chair from her son's desk, lowering her narrow frame into it.

"If you're ill, Lloyd, you must let me call a doctor."

Lloyd shook his head negatively.

"Darling boy! Darling boy! Have you been studying too hard at school?"

"I'm not going back there, Mother. Ever."

"But there's no sense in changing schools during your senior year!"

Lloyd turned to see her face. It was like looking at himself in a mirror, their ash-blonde hair, whitish-blue eyes, slightly recessed chins, and long thin noses identical.

For a moment, the blood-red of her fingernail lacquer seemed to fascinate him. He remembered yesterday's chicken in the orchard, and the cat in the alley this morning just as the sun was coming up, quickly covering his face with his hands, which smelled sour.

Like a sleep-walker, he glanced at his hands, taking comfort from the fact that they were no longer like hers, calloused heavily as they were from having torn the aerials off so many cars behind the drug store, oily, grease encrusted under his nails from all the muddy rocks he had been tossing in the river.

Mrs. Murphy's swift intake of breath surprised both of them. "You were always such an immaculate child, Lloyd." She got up and opened a window. "Now your room smells like a zoo."

He watched her bold strides from his room. Imprisoning his two index fingers in his mouth, he pulled his jaws apart, sticking his tongue out at her back.

He didn't really believe that mothers have eyes in the back of their head any more. So, he was surprised when she turned and said: "Sticking your tongue out at your mother isn't nice, Lloyd."

She went down into the kitchen and he could hear her crying.

Maybe if he put his hands over his ears, he wouldn't have to hear.

"I never thought much of that college anyway," Murph said authoritatively. "Far-out, bearded beatniks, pestering the poor President of the United States. Picketing in front of the White House when they're not taking benzedrine and marijuana."

"My son has never worn a beard!"

'Well, I'm not interfering, Thelma. But he can't stay up in that room doing nothing all day and then wandering about the streets by night."

"You've never been any help to me where the boy's concerned."

"Don't bring that up again, Thelma. You shut me out of his life a helluva long time ago."

"But I don't know what to tell the dean's office."

"Tell them to send the butterfly net for him."

"Alvin Murphy! That's a filthy thing to say!"

Lloyd had succeeded in shutting out their arguing, but the pressure against his ears created its own sound, a cadent beat of hooves against the cobblestones.

THE cobblestoned streets of Port Campbell are one of the tourist attractions in the historic old town proper whenever the weather drives people off the golden beaches fronting ocean and bay, or when the tinseled glamor of the neon-lighted gulls suddenly scream danger.

Molly Magown had been counting the multi-shaped cobblestones in front of the house her father and grandmother were currently living in, waiting for the postman to reach Number 29. She kept a few fingers at her face, shading the bruised eye. Disappointment was short lived when she watched the postman pass by. Why should Brett write? There was nothing more to be said.

Molly turned from the window, trying to keep the left side of her face averted, as her grandmother wheeled her chair into the parlor, the old woman's gnarled hands almost crippled by the sclerosis that had long ago deprived her of the use of her legs.

"You expecting mail?" Mrs. Magown asked sarcastically.

"Not really, Gran. Are you comfortable?"

"Comfortable?" the old voice rasped. "When have I been com-

fortable? When have you cared for my comfort? Raise somebody else's brat for eighteen long years, and then she runs off to Civil Service. Civil Service! When was any civil servant ever civil? Servants! You can't get a woman to come in and clean your house any more. Two dollars and tote, that's what it used to be. Now they want a dollar an hour and turn up their noses."

"As a matter of fact, Gran, it's been changed. It's now a dollar-and-a-quarter."

"Changed. That's what wrong with this country. They change things. Well, I never voted for none of them. There hasn't been a man in the White House worth his salt since Calvin Coolidge. I voted for Cal. I'd vote for him tomorrow if he'd run."

"He's dead, Gran."

"Dead? Of course, he's dead. Anybody who's any good has to die. Life is a punishment, I tell you. That's why I'm still living at eighty-one."

"I'll do the breakfast dishes, Gran. And I must say I like this house much better than where we used to live."

Mrs. Magowan swung her chair about as Molly passed. "What I want to know is why did you suddenly up and come home?"

Past master at sarcasm and suspicion, Gran might even now suspect the truth. The old hand shook as she raised it to her bony chin, from which glistening white goat hairs sprang. The fierce fires which for over eighty years had kept her sure in what she thought were the ways of her God-of-wrath demanded other fuels besides her constant grievances, her chronic ills. She couldn't be wrong. Not after all the years of watching sinful people.

"Are you pregnant?" she asked suddenly.

Molly was at the sink, a hand on the faucet. "Yes, I am."

It wasn't a whine or a moan as much as an expiration of pent-up breath, like a whistle in the old woman's throat. The old woman's frameless eyeglasses had fallen to her lap.

"Like mother, like daughter," Mrs. Magowan's voice rasped, and the gnarled fist smashed against the brittle kneecap.

Molly found the fake medicine bottle into which her father had poured several shots of eighty-proof Irish. Maybe Gran really believed it was medicine when she took a few sips every hour, demon rum having been one of her pet grievances, on a par with gambling and fornication.

"Please take your medicine, Gran."

The old woman opened toothless jaws for the spoon. Smacking her lips after the second dose. "Your mother was a tramp, too, Molly."

Years ago, when Gran applied such epithets to Molly's dead

mother, the girl might have argued back that there was a difference between being a tramp and a dancer. But since none of the arguments had ever convinced old lady Magowan, what was the use?

Molly's mother had been featured in a burlesque show along Port Campbell's infamous mile back during the summer of 1942. Beautiful and wild, nobody had believed that Mona Louis had two sisters in the convent until after her death in childbirth, when the nuns showed up to give her Christian burial.

Nor had Mona at twenty seen any wilder than young Mike Magowan, then hell-bent on keeping out of the military draft, enough so that he married Mona. This hadn't impressed the draft board, however.

"My mother can hardly be blamed for anything I've done," Molly said.

"Your father will kill you," Mrs. Magowan said, striking her fist against the palm of her other hand.

"No," Molly corrected, stooping so that Gran could take in the bruised, swollen eye. "He won't kill me."

Molly went upstairs to her room, but the commotion down in one of the adjacent alleys assailed her ears and she looked out the window. Children en route to school seemed to have stumbled upon a dead cat.

Molly's small body shivered.

Why don't the children go on and leave that poor dead cat alone?

A few adults gathered.

A woman screamed, most likely the owner of the cat.

The screaming woman fell to her knees, other adults trying to comfort her.

Molly opened her window, immediately questioning her action. For she felt sick to her stomach.

Unwittingly, Molly found herself glancing above the tragic scene in the alley, to all the windows in a dozen houses that seemed to look back upon her with cruel, threatening eyes.

Quickly, Molly tugged at the Venetian blinds, believing that she was alone, safe.

LLOYD GLEASON had heard the woman's scream.

He was half hidden behind damask draperies, watching his mother run into the alley to where the others were gathered.

"Throat slit from ear to ear," a small boy announced.

Lloyd watched his mother's hand fly to her throat.

But he lost interest in the scene in the alley. It was while lighting a cigarette that he happened to glance across a series of houses and garages, to where a young, dark-haired girl had thrown open a window. The girl's hand at her throat reminded him momentarily of his mother's action.

A heat rose through Lloyd's

body. He had never to his knowledge seen the girl before.

And yet something about her carried vague identification. Lloyd's mouth had gone dry, the back of his neck burned.

After the girl closed the window, she drew the blinds, as though she, too, had felt the invisible tie that drew him to her. Lloyd's eyes narrowed, as he sniffed out the cigarette between index finger and thumb, no longer feeling any burning sensation from this action.

What had been merely an idea, an ill-shaped desire in the back of his mind the past few nights, seemed to be gaining form as he breathed heavily. And where the idea had been little more than gray foam dancing before his eyes, receding away from him as his hands went out to grasp it, it now had a face, and he knew that her body would be warm to his touch, dynamic to his kisses, electrified by the complétion he would give it.

Lloyd turned. He walked to the closet to where his trench coat was hanging. From the deep inner pocket, he withdrew a plastic bag, holding a long, thin knife.

ON MURDER-MINUS-TEN Molly received a letter from Edna Morgan.

> *. . . so you can imagine what I felt like saying when I saw him standing there big as life! "Hi, Edna . . .," he says to me. He asks if I've heard from you, and I said, "Of course. I happen to stick by a friend in trouble, which is more than I can say for others." He carried my tray to the table for me and then took the chair opposite. He certainly didn't eat very much, which accounts for his boyish figure, I suppose. I had to do all the talking. But he asked me to remember him to you when next I wrote. I said, "I doubt if Molly will be forgetting you for the next four months, sir." Then some friends of his came along, slapping him on the back and he went off to whisper to them. I suppose they had a few girls lined up for the evening . . .*

"That letter from him?" Mike Magowan demanded of his daughter, tearing it from Molly's hands.

Before she could explain, her father had thrown the letter into the fireplace. Mike Magowan, looking the worse for last night's tear, fell into a chair and began to cry.

"To think my only child would do this to me!" he sobbed.

Grandmother Magowan laughed. "I told you blood will tell. And how long were you and that dancer married before that girl was born?"

Molly had to get out of the room.

"Only six months, that's how long!" her grandmother screamed after her.

Upstairs in her own room, Molly felt the need for fresh air, throwing open the window.

Faint, she wondered if falling from this height would end the pain. Or would it only result in more pain, more guilt?

It had been wrong coming back here. But where else could she have gone? Edna's suggestion of working until everybody knew? And then going into a Crittenden home? No. If she lived, her child must live and go on being her child. How could she have stayed on in Washington, with Brett there, his wife?

Brett's suggestion? He had wanted to drive her to a town in Texas, where friends had taken their girl friends in a fix. But she couldn't murder anything and then have to live with that guilt the rest of her life.

Did she only imagine the whistling?

Tschaikovsky.

Folding her arms, leaning against the frame of the open window, the late-January winds off the bay blowing her hair about her face, Molly surrendered to the unreality of the moment, to the fierce power of memory.

Closing her eyes, she could almost sense his breathing against her lips—a beautiful Sunday afternoon in August, when Washington seemed deserted. "Is that Tschaikovsky, Brett?"

But even the fierceness of memory's assault couldn't withstand the reality of the present.

Somebody was whistling the tune right now; and as Molly scanned the circle of windows about the converging alleyways, she saw the figure of him, just a darkened silhouette of a man.

MURDER-MINUS-FIVE. Molly had gathered the laundry together after supper—Gran's things, her father's underwear, sheets and towels. She intended to take them to the laundromat, three blocks from her home.

Although it wasn't nine o'clock the street leading to the avenue was deserted.

Inside the laundromat, Molly checked to see if her notice, announcing her availability for baby sitting, was still intact.

Her clothes, having begun the twenty-minute cycle, didn't require watching, so she walked down the intersecting street to a drugstore.

She tried to put through a collect call to Edna, but the line was busy.

Molly ordered a glass of milk, requesting the druggist's permission to tack a situation-wanted notice on his bulletin board.

She walked back to the laundromat, transferring her wash to a dryer across the room.

The place had filled up with sailors and marines doing their weekly wash, and Molly felt their appreciative eyes looking her over.

She decided not to sit there while the dryer spun her wash, but to walk back to the drugstore.

It was then that she had the feeling she was being followed. She didn't glance back, in case a few sailors were cruising after her, knowing from experience that they could misinterpret any questioning look or even fearful glance, for some kind of invitation.

Before she reached the drugstore, she sensed that she had increased her pace, and her hands shook as she put through her collect call.

"Of course I'll accept a call from Molly Magowan," she heard Edna say; and for the first time in weeks, Molly felt that there was some hope for the human race. "Molly! How goes it?"

"Edna, I realize I owe you twenty-three dollars already. I thought I'd have a baby-sitting job by now, but—"

"How much do you need, Molly?"

They agreed that Edna would wire Molly twenty-five dollars first thing in the morning.

"Do you realize you forgot to pack your crucifix after all, Molly?"

"On purpose," Molly explained. "I'll leave it with you a while."

"Oh, Molly, you feel so guilty, don't you?"

"Have you seen him lately, Edna?"

"Honey, Brett seems to have left Washington—"

Molly had difficulty fighting back the tears as she replaced the receiver.

She stumbled blindly into a sharp-faced young man, who was waiting to use the telephone. "Sorry," she said, as one of his tanned hands reached out to steady her.

His hand lingered on her shoulder a moment; she felt his fingers through her cloth coat, as though the gesture that was meant to be helpful had suddenly become offensive.

Unwittingly, she turned around, staring at him as he sat down in the phone booth. His eyes, with too much white showing, were upon her, not on the dial; as Molly went outside into the night, her back be-

came cold, a shiver running along her spine.

"Ghost walking over my grave," she murmured.

The wind from the bay had increased sharply, beating about her face, as though it were ordaining that she must go no further, one of her arms wrapping itself about a telegraph pole, the twinkling neon lights above a service station making her dizzy.

"Too much drinky?" a tough-looking Navy Chief asked, his breath alcoholic. "I've got just the cure for it, baby, back in my car." He tried to unwind her from the telegraph pole.

"Stop it!" Molly flared, pushing his hand away.

Two young Marines watching her break away from the sailor stood there laughing. "Not tonight, buddy," one of them called out. "Too cold."

Molly ran all the way back to the laundromat.

"Need any help?" a kid sailor asked, his friends grinning as Molly folded her laundry.

"No, thank you," Molly said, stuffing the rest of the clothes into a pillow case.

Her own street had been deserted earlier, but walking toward the lighted avenue had somehow seemed safer than this trip into darkness.

She started to run, panic rising in her, not daring to look back at the footsteps behind her. When she reached the door of her house, she turned and saw that there was nobody in the street.

Still, her body shivered and the poplars, elms, and evergreens along the street seemed to take on a madness in the wind, dipping branches, casting bizarre shadows on the moon-lighted cobblestones, the shadows lengthening, stretching, and seizing from her mind the strains of Tschaikovsky's *casse noisette*.

"I am going out of my mind," she whispered, her head against the door.

Up in her own room, she tried to rationalize love. "I am too close to the pain of loss. It'll get better, better. I will forget him. I'm not the first wench who loved and lost. Think of all the women who have lost their Bretts in war. They survive."

Throwing herself on the bed, she gave way to a mild hysteria. The days wouldn't become better, she couldn't go on. There was nothing.

All she needed was time. And this child. His child. She'd make a life for them somehow, someplace. There would he rewards: Watching her son grow up, helping him to realize his ambitions. The years, please God, would pass quickly.

"I want to die, dear God, and I believe suicide is wrong."

Of a sudden, she remembered how her own mother had died giving birth to her. She could take comfort from this fact. Why, she

had only four more months to live out this pain.

In time, she slept, little realizing that she had only a few days before death yawned before her.

On the day of the murder, Lloyd Gleason snapped out of his nightmare in a cold sweat, feeling weak-kneed, his stomach burning.

Dropping his pajamas, he sauntered to the window, glancing across the semi-darkened alleys. Though the slats of her Venetian blinds, he could see that a light burned.

"Good morning, my love," he whispered against the window.

Turning from the window, he sat on his bed. If he counted to one hundred, each number would serve as a command, gaining the ascendency over her lesser mind, bringing her to the window.

Yes, it would happen tonight. Because his mother and stepfather were driving north to visit Murphy's family.

Lloyd Gleason closed his eyes, his hands gripping the bed. He was on the roller coaster, about to crash down the mountainside, reaching that point where life and death were joined and the questions of twenty-two years might be answered at long last.

"DRAT THAT girl! Must I prepare my own breakfast with that lazy girl sleeping in?"

"I'll be down in a few moments, Gran."

"I suppose you became accustomed to such hours with him!"

Molly knotted her bathrobe tightly as she descended the stairs.

"Is that how you dressed for him? No wonder you're pregnant."

"What would you like for breakfast, Gran? Cereal? Eggs?"

"I need my medicine first. If it's not too much trouble for you."

Molly found the Irish whiskey. "Your medicine, Gran. I hope it doesn't taste too awful."

The old woman smacked her lips. "Not too awful. You're carrying it in back, aren't you? That means a very small boy. Well, you'll have less trouble putting a boy out for adoption. If it's all right in the head, I mean."

Molly plugged in the toaster, put the tea kettle on.

"If you think you're going to bring your brat into this house, you've got another think coming."

As Molly stood over the sink, she had a sudden feeling that she was being watched, not only by the old woman in the wheel chair, but by something more threatening. Quickly, she glanced up, the container of tomato juice falling on the sink board.

"You're clumsy, too, aren't you?"

Molly's attention was focussed on the window sill, where a little sparrow chirped strangely. The bird was billing, those ridiculously small eyes watching her every movement.

Nor did the bird fly away when the old woman shouted at it.

Molly crumbled a piece of bread, walking out on the back porch.

She flung the crumbs to her left so that some of them fell beneath the window where the sparrow perched. But the bird flew high across the garages to another window sill, Molly watching it intently.

There was movement at that window, a man's hands opening the window, and the bird flew off to a tree.

"That means something terrible is about to happen," old Mrs. Magowan said. "A bird is always bad luck, a harbinger of evil."

"Not a poor little sparrow," Molly argued.

"It means death," the old woman contradicted fiercely. "I've seen it time and again where the birds gather."

"Death—" Molly repeated involuntarily.

"I suppose you're hoping that I die today," Gran said. "Maybe I will, but who would do penance for this family? I've been sentenced to live until the last Magowan is dead. That's you, your father, and this brat you're bringing into this world.

"The dead cat in the alley," Mrs. Magowan continued. "You think that meant nothing?"

"It means that there's a cruel, sick boy in this community, that's all."

Mrs. Magowan forced a laugh. "It is a mark, a warning of evil about to take place. Cats and birds have been linked to evil, and one of Mr. Foody's chickens had its throat cut not very long ago. Blood is a mark of witchcraft."

"Let's hope they find the boy who is doing this and get him to a psychiatrist," Molly said flatly.

"Open the door, Molly!" the old woman ordered.

"Why?" Molly asked, a hand uncomfortably at her throat.

Mrs. Magowan insisted there had been a tap at the door, and in her insisting Molly imagined that she, too, heard a second and third tap.

But when she opened the door, there was nobody on the porch.

"You have just admitted death," Mrs. Magowan announced.

She was smiling, as though the idea pleased her somehow.

LLOYD was pleased that it hadn't snowed until several hours after his mother and father took to the road. Murph was too dogged a creature to turn back, even if he had to put up overnight along the way.

Lloyd walked through the house, strangely silent. He went down into the basement recreation room and lit the fire, watching the flames dance about the newspapers in the fireplace.

He spread thick wax paper under the sheet on the Hollywood

bed. He placed his long-bladed knife under the bed.

Next, he dialed the phone number Molly had given on her baby-sitting want-ad. "Miss Magowan. I am Wade Murdock. I need your services this evening."

"Oh, that's wonderful, sir. I need the work."

"I think it would be best if I picked you up in front of the drugstore where you left your phone number. Actually, I live quite close by, but I think this will save you hunting for house numbers in the dark."

"That's kind of you, sir. How old are your children?"

"My children? Two little girls, aged four and two. They won't be any trouble. I'm sure they'll be fast asleep when I bring you to our place."

"What time would you want me to meet you, Mr. Murdock?"

"Time? Oh, as soon as it's dark. Say sevenish?"

When he replaced the receiver, he found that his left hand was shaking badly.

THE MAILMAN delivered a letter from Edna, and Molly scanned over the unimportant parts, looking for his name.

"As for Brett, he still seems to be on some kind of leave. I had hoped that he'd write to you by now . . ."

As she dressed that evening, Molly wondered if Brett had returned to sea, if even now he were flying his A-4 from the deck of that nuclear-powered carrier.

Suddenly, her grandmother's harping on pronunciations about evil symbols shook Molly's body. "Oh God, don't let it mean that Brett is to die! Don't let him feel so guilty about me that he no longer cares."

She was determined to write to him when she returned from her baby-sitting job. She must let him know that she didn't want him to worry.

As she opened the front door of her home, the new-fallen snow looked innocent and clean, but in the sky there was violence, gray and black clouds, rolling, threatening.

As she stepped from the porch, the darkness seemed to reach out for her, and there was one moment, when she almost went back in and bolted the door.

Lloyd Gleason cruised his *Triumph* about the streets of Port Campbell in the light snow, noticing that there wasn't any sun in evidence in the gathering dusk. Why, he could have had her meet him earlier than seven.

At seven on the button, he drove past the drugstore, noticing that she was seated at the fountain, a glass of milk in front of her, the evening newspapers in her hands.

"Get up my love!" he muttered under his breath. "Our hour has come."

Again he drove around the block, sure that he must not go into the drugstore.

But not until seven-thirty did she actually show up outside on the corner. He pulled up directly, apologizing for being late.

Molly slipped in beside him, asking him the kind of car this was. He sniffed the good smell of her.

"I have the strangest feeling that we've met before, Mr. Murdock."

"I believe we met quite accidentally, Miss Magowan. You were coming out of the phone booth the other night. I was going in."

Molly thought him rather young looking to have a child four years old.

When he pulled up into a driveway, Molly glanced about, the cobblestoned streets similar to her own, but the houses here were more impressive.

She was about to start up the steps to the front porch when he said: "Let's use this entrance, Miss Magowan," smiling limply.

Molly followed him down to the basement level and when he keyed the door, she found herself in a foyer.

He told her to leave her coat and boots there.

Molly walked toward the handsome fireplace, warming her hands. When she turned, she noticed that he was sitting across from her in a chair, removing his shoes and socks.

"I hope I haven't caught pneumonia," he said.

Molly frowned, his bare feet seemingly out of place in the room. "Where are the children, Mr. Murdock?"

"Upstairs. I have an ingrown toenail. It hurts. Tell me about yourself, Miss Magowan."

Fever rose about Molly's body and she moved away from the fireplace. She felt like reminding him that she hadn't applied for any top-secret job in a security agency. She wished his wife would come down in a hurry.

She told him that she was staying with her father and grandmother, that she was twenty-two years old, and had been working in Washington.

"You're very beautiful, Miss Magowan. Truly lovely."

It sounded a genuine compliment, but Molly questioned his saying it. She walked about the recreation room, trying to contain her nerves, glancing at the bizarre abstract paintings on the windowless walls. "They're very unusual."

"I painted them," he told her.

He was standing up now, his eyes dilating in his head, and she watched him take a pill, then another. There was a bar at the end of the recreation room, with a sink from which he poured himself a drink of water. "Would you like something, Miss Magowan?"

"No thanks," she said. Her throat was very dry.

There was something wrong with this man. He wasn't right in the head, the pills, the garish bare feet that seemed to worry him from time to time. He walked first to one door near the bar, turning the key in it, then across the length of the room to the door they had entered, turning the key.

With gathering fear, Molly watched him deposit the keys in his pocket. There was no doubt about it—he was going to molest her.

Frantic, she glanced about for a phone. There wasn't any.

"Why did you lock those doors, sir?" Her voice seemed very small.

"So that we might be alone, my love." He was walking toward her.

"Please, Mr. Murdock! Open the door and let me out. I just want to leave. That's all—"

"You can never leave, my love." One of his hands reached out for her clumsily.

Molly wanted to dart behind a chair for protection, but her legs wouldn't function. "Please, sir! I've never harmed you."

His hands gripped her shoulders, and she couldn't stop her body from trembling, his mouth cutting off the scream in her throat, his kisses damp, cold, chilling, her fists beating against his chest, as he dragged her to the Hollywood bed.

"Oh God!" she cried, as one of his hands ripped her dress the length of her body.

"Oh God!" she cried again, breaking away from him, running to the door through which they had entered, screaming, "Mrs. Murdock!"

He laughed, holding the long-bladed knife in his hands. "There isn't any Mrs. Murdock. There's nobody to hear you, nobody outside, because this room has been sound-proofed. Come to me, my love."

"No!" she whispered, unable to keep her eyes off the cold blade that glistened in his hands. He slid the long-bladed knife across the

palm of his other hand, his face releasing a sense of power.

He was moving toward her like a cat—a cat dead in the alley, she remembered—and his smile grew sicker, as she felt herself slipping to her knees.

Grabbing her by the hair, he pulled her to a standing position, a strong smell of perspiration emanating from him.

Again, with that swift movement, he tore her slip down the front, and she felt the cold blade of the knife at her throat as she screamed, his other arm pulling her lewdly up against his body. "My love!" he breathed, kissing her throat; and as she swung away from him, he tugged her back by the brassiere.

"You're going to kill me," she heard herself saying stupidly; and in the saying, there seemed to be Gran's morning premonitions of birds perched on window sills.

"I am going to teach you about life and love," he said.

"I know about life and love," she sobbed, wanting to tell him about Brett; and her own oft-entertained desire to die rose up feverishly in her body.

Hadn't she begged God for a way out other than suicide? This could be it.

"I don't want to live without Brett anyway," she stammered, trying to grope for the right words, her eyes on the bare feet of him that always seemed to be coming toward her. But before God, he wasn't going to rape her!

She turned from him, naked except for his shirt.

Hardly had she reached the door by the bar, when he asked, "A glass of wine, my love?"

And she looked upon him to nod stupidly.

He placed the knife upon the bar as he found the proper decanter. He removed from behind a door two handsomely fragile goblets.

Molly's eyes were held by some invisbile magnet to the gleam of that knife, no sound now but the drop of red wine into the goblets. The wine would be warm, the knife cold, painful, but quick in its releasing of her from a much far worse pain.

"Throat cut from ear to ear—" the little boy in the alley had announced.

But in that same moment, the child beneath her heart jumped, somersaulting her back to some classroom or drafty church, the biblical text speaking of Elizabeth's child leaping for joy as the Blessed Virgin entered the room. John the Baptist leaping for joy in his mother's womb, because he was in the presence of the unborn Christ.

Involuntarily, Molly's hand moved to her stomach and her child kicked more furiously for life.

Molly faced Lloyd Gleason,

watching how he extended the goblet of wine to her.

"Thank you," she said, her words more for her unborn son, as she combined acceptance of the goblet with an automatic thrust of the wine into her would-be murderer's face.

He cursed brutally, his hands going to his eyes, and she had the knife in her hands, hating it, but knowing a resolve greater than his.

"Give me the key to that door!" she was able to say, her voice strange, not her own. "I will go quietly. You have nothing to fear from me."

He wiped his face with his shirt before starting his catlike walk toward her.

"Don't!" she warned. "Don't make me kill you."

He jumped, both of his hands about her wrist that held the knife. Molly screamed, as they struggled, feeling the resounding slap he administered to her face, dodging the kick of his foot, her fingers somehow holding the knife tightly, his curses assaulting her ears, the sweaty smell of him ominously threatening.

She felt the knife slipping slightly from her grasp, just before he brought her hand down, and she lunged forward, feeling throughout her own body how the cold blade had found its mark in his shoulder.

She backed away, still holding the knife, as shocked as she was fascinated by the blood spurting across his chest and down.

She watched him look at his bloody hand unbelievingly, and she kept her eyes on him as she backed toward the bed where she might find the key in his trousers.

But he was staggering toward her again, cursing, threatening, and she must raise the knife, knowing in that split instant of self realization that she would plunge it into his stomach this time.

"Please!" she whispered, saliva filling her mouth. "Don't make me —" imagining voices upstairs, footsteps, screaming for help, as she backed away from him, circling the room.

"Lloyd!" the woman's voice behind the door at the bar seemed to call.

Molly ran to that door, begging the unknown woman to get a key. "He's trying to kill me!"

Something deep in her mind tried to tell her that she had only imagined the woman's voice, but now there was sound behind that door. The door was being opened; and her murderer was on his knees, screaming pathetically.

Molly saw the older woman and the man, the horror in their eyes, as she dropped the hateful weapon to the floor.

"Lloyd darling!" the woman cried, rushing to her son. "She's stabbed you!"

The older man stared unbelievingly at the knife on the floor, the

trail of blood, at Molly's half-nakedness.

"What have you done to Lloyd?" he gasped.

"He tried to kill me," Molly heard herself explaining.

Molly turned toward the garishly muffled cries in the woman's throat, standing in new horror as she watched her murderer choke his mother, but he cast the woman aside from him with a terrible reserve of strength.

"And you?" he said, moving toward Molly.

The man backed away through the door as Molly found that her feet would move in the other direction. She reached the other end of the room, where she might help the gasping woman to her feet; and when she looked ahead at the door through which both men had disappeared, she saw that the bloody knife was no longer on the floor.

"Water," the woman begged.

Molly ran to the bar, bringing the second goblet of wine to the woman, picking up her brassiere and slipping into it, hearing the men struggle at the stairs, their curses, trying to help the woman rise to her feet as the murderer's last cry escaped from his throat.

"Oh Lloyd—" the woman moaned, refusing to be comforted.

LLOYD GLEASON had been pronounced dead by the ambulance physician of multiple stab wounds about his stomach and throat. His stepfather lived a day longer.

Detective Lieutenant Ray Marvolian told Molly to take her time, as he sat across from her in the parlor of her home. "This is the last time I'll be bothering you, Miss Magowan," he said.

He wanted additional information about the first time she had met Gleason at the drugstore in late January.

"It was as I told you, sir. I brushed against him as I left the phone booth. That was all."

"That was enough!" Grandmother snapped.

"Do you think I led him on?" Molly asked. "Is that why you're questioning me again?"

"No, M'am. We're just interested in the possibility of your having spoken to him earlier. Your name was found scribbled a thousand times on various tablets and memo pads in his room. You can't account for that?"

"No. Except that I left my name on the notices I put up on those bulletin boards. I guess it was wrong, but other girls do it."

"Too many girls, Miss Magowan—" Marvolian said.

Gran said: "He thinks that cat-killer put you in the family way, that's what he thinks."

But Molly saw that Marvolian didn't think that at all.

"We know that you lived in Washington until last month. We've talked to Miss Edna Morgan, and

to Lieutenant Commander Brett Pender."

Molly reached for a handkerchief, embarrassed. "Then, you know all about me, sir."

"We had to check up," Marvolian said. "Since you were rather hysterical that night, and there always was the chance that Lloyd Gleason probably was the father of your child."

"I thought I wanted to die!" Molly blurted out. "Maybe you'd better write that down, sir. And then, all of a sudden, I didn't want to die at all. I wanted to live and I think I could have killed that man in order to live. And to protect my baby."

"You're not bringing any bastard into this house," Grandmother said.

Molly walked with Marvolian to the door, permitting him to take both of her hands. "You're going to be very glad that you survived that maniacal attack, Miss Magowan." He released one of her hands so that he might wave toward the car, where several men were seated.

Numb, Molly watched Brett Pender alight from the car, the child beneath her heart kicking hard.

Brett took the front steps in one jump, "Molly, darling."

She felt small in his arms, not caring that Marvolian was watching as Brett found her lips.

"My divorce is going through. We're going to be married, Molly. It's only going to take another month. Please come back and stay with Edna. She wants you, too."

Molly tried to take in his words, wondering if she had been murdered the other night, and if this were her initial glimpse of what Heaven was like, a place where everything wonderful came about.

She heard Pender thanking Marvolian.

"Get inside out of the cold, Molly," Brett said. "Let me help you pack."

"Who might you be?" Grandmother snapped at Brett.

"The guy who loves your granddaughter, Mrs. Magowan. The guy who's making you an ancestor."

Halfway up the stairs, Molly turned. It was wonderful hearing Brett's carefree laughter, and she wanted to see his face.

There was so much she had to tell him; and there would be plenty of time for the telling.

He seemed to realize this, too, as he bent slightly, saluting her.

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

A Murder Story of Strange, Dark Power.

WHO'S AFRAID OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD?

He had the look of a monster, the hulking man from Maple Avenue. She had the face of an angel—a body that would tempt a saint. Nothing would separate them—nothing but a little bit of Murder . . .

by WALTER SNOW

MISSING WIFE JOBS are strictly for private agencies unless the husband isn't curious but the neighbors are.

When I returned to the squadroom that night, I was ready to chuck my extra pay and ask for assignment as a traffic cop. I'd been questioning liquor store owners all day about a series of petty burglaries and had gotten absolutely nowhere.

My skipper is a big ox of a detective lieutenant with sandy red hair circling a bald patch. He pushed aside a dieting booklet and picked up a lavender-hued letter which gave out with the same spinsterish perfume.

"Hope you haven't got a hot date tonight," he said with the cold grin of a small-city despot.

We get along, however, since I'm his kind of a guy.

The fragrant letter came from a fairly good address in Portchester, a one-time whaling port in Southern New England. It was the bayside residential section, now a lower middle-class Irish district: retired teachers, widows of dentists and Main Street merchants, all forced by inflation to take in roomers.

"I hesitate to write you," the tipster began, "but a dear little lady whose acquaintanceship I treasured has disappeared mysteriously. She was, I believe, a woman of considerable means. Her husband, Henry Wilcox, won't give me her forwarding address. He said if his wife wants to get in touch she'll write. Her silence, he added nastily, means that she doesn't want to see me again.

"Winona Wilcox is—was—a comparative newcomer to our historic town but she was becoming active in our cultural circles. None of her friends can imagine how she could have passed up the last of four lectures on dear Katherine Mansfield."

The skipper waited until I looked up and then asked, "Know this Mansfield dame?"

"She's some English writer," I told him.

The skipper said he didn't go in for women mystery writers because they wasted too much time with descriptions of gowns, sounded like *Better Homes and Gardens* and dripped with sentimentality. Diplomatically I agreed I was kind of hazy about the Mansfield dame but felt she wasn't exactly a specialist in mayhem.

A certain girl could cue me; in fact, I had a date with her this very night. As the skipper rose to don his trench coat, I glanced out of the fly-specked window, began to savor the warm welcome expected from my date, when suddenly I went cold.

Until this very minute I'd been as eager for my date as a sailor nearing port. My brain girl was a black-haired little widow who had invited me to her apartment for cocktails and a steak. Until now the only hesitation had been a suspicion that she, almost child-like in body, was older than she pretended and might even shade me by a few years.

Her latest invitation was the third and the first two had done something to me, Frank Ferrari, the tough guy who wasn't going to get hooked again. Nothing, it seemed, could have stopped me from keeping my date, but now an alien, chilling idea intruded.

Mumbling good night to the skipper, I continued to stare into a blurred nothingness. Was I glad that this unexpected assignment might provide me with a night's escape from a husband-hunting female? It was something more. I spoke the magic name in a low voice: Theresa. Never the diminutive Terry. Always the full three-syllabled Theresa, with a hint of a nun's flowing robes and a slight bow to her saintly patroness.

Outwardly my demure widow was a drastic contrast to the blowsy and ignorant dames we usually encounter. Already she had made an impression on the police chief, the detective skipper and several members of the Ferrari family. All

would think me a ring-tailed skunk if I took advantage of my Theresa and did not marry her.

My fingers groped in a coat pocket for a jeweler's tiny box, a diamond ring picked up this afternoon. Imagine Frank Ferrari, who grew up next to the coal docks, son of a longshoreman and himself an ex-pug, marrying a Mrs. Brains from college who was also a Mrs. Looker. Due to three dates she was already a habit. Was that why I felt a trap closing? Had I subconsciously been debating whether to present the eye-popping sparkler or hop a slow boat for Hong Kong?

I telephoned the Rock of Ages Insurance Company and asked for Mrs. St. Clair, my Theresa. I explained that this was one night of all nights when I hadn't intended to be late. How late? Maybe ten, I added, weakening. That wasn't too late, I was assured in a voice that sent a tingle through my veins. No hour would be too late tonight.

Then I asked about the lady author.

My brain girl brought it back. Katherine Mansfield wrote short stories. Back at Portchester High I had tried to read a couple but they'd been too ethereal. Mood pieces, with no plot and with delicate wistful endings seldom more decisive than a regret. K. M. wasn't as popular now, but her early admirers remained loyal. Theresa, on her one trip to Europe, had made a pilgrimage to K. M.'s grave outside of Paris, near Fontainbleau. It was significant that Theresa didn't say visit but pilgrimage.

THE LETTER-WRITER of the lavender scent, Miss Editha Bentley, lived on Soundview Drive in a veranda-circled old mansion that had a square watch tower and also a ship captain's walk with a fine view of the blue waters. The difference between No. 417 and the other neighboring mansions of yesteryear was that Miss Editha did not post a *Rooms for Rent* sign in the winter, had only two standbys as tenants, both elderly, and had six empties.

"I prefer a quiet house, a big, almost empty mansion," she explained, "except when I get top summer rentals. I was born for the finer things of life."

Miss Editha was tiny, slender and delicate. She wore a lavender gown and her white hair, modestly built up to give her just two inches more in height, was tinted a bluish-lavender. She was a semi-retired school teacher in her late sixties, eking out her public school pension by teaching English at Immaculate Conception, an all-girl high, probably at half her old salary.

"Sorry I brought you out here," she said, once the introductions were over. "Guess I should stick to dear Katherine Mansfield and not watch TV suspense thrillers."

Under the prodding of occasion-

al questions, she apologized for Henry Wilcox, husband of the absent woman. Henry had a gruff exterior, had been brusque at first and she, Miss Editha, had taken needless alarm. She had loaned Winona a rare book but it was all right now because Henry belatedly had returned the treasure—L. M.'s Letters, edited by John Middleton Murry, and bound especially for Miss Editha in hand-tooled morocco.

The only reason Winona hadn't returned it personally before she left on her trip was because Henry, the husband, said he was driving down Soundview Avenue and would drop it off here. Unfortunately, he had a flat tire and due to the delay had forgotten to deliver the book. It had later become wedged in back of a car cushion with one of the seat-belt clasps.

"Did Mr. Wilcox say where his wife went?"

"New Orleans. An aunt was suddenly taken sick. I knew it was something emergent because dear Winona Wilcox would never, not ever in this world, have missed the fourth and last of the lecture series."

"Why?"

"It represented the winnowing of the curious from the true cultists. We had a near capacity crowd for the first lecture, since all English students were required to be present. The college, you know, is all girl. Attendance at the second dropped to seventy. For the third there were only thirty, the real buffs. That's when I lent Winona the copy of Katherine's letters. Twenty-nine of those thirty, all but Winona, were on hand for the fourth. Oh, it was wonderful!"

I had to ride with Miss Editha's enthusiasm but kept the probing questions.

Miss Editha hadn't taken down a forwarding address in New Orleans, but was certain Winona would write soon. She didn't have any photograph. Dr. Oliver's wife had taken a group snapshot at the third lecture.

The word-picture Miss Editha gave of the missing woman was startling: a frail, elf-like child-woman about five feet tall and weighing one hundred and two pounds, exactly. Winona had mentioned her weight. It was an easily remembered number.

"Are her arms and legs delicate but on the bony side?" I asked.

"How did you know?"

"What color is her hair?"

"Very black—raven-hued."

I closed my eyes, tried to fight off a dizzy feeling. The dear, little thing described resembled my Theresa, who certainly was not missing. She had worked regularly for the Rock of Ages Insurance during the past year of widowhood ever since three sailors, on a twenty-four leave from the New London submarine base, had telescoped into her late husband's car.

"What does Wilcox look like?"

Miss Editha studied me through rimless spectacles. "You're Italian, a bit swarthy, and so darker than Wilcox. You were a football player twenty-odd years ago. Now, nearing forty, you still have the shoulders. I don't mean you're Wilcox's exact double by any means. However, he could very well have been one of the huskier linesmen on your Portchester High team some twenty years ago."

I left the book-lined parlor feeling goose pimples. Despite Miss Editha's protestations that there no longer was a mystery, I knew I just had to find out everything possible about the other big bear who had married a brainy child-woman and had not only tired of her but possibly had been driven to the ultimate act of violence.

Laurette Oliver, the doctor's wife, whom I visited next, tried to slam the door in my face. The toe of my thick brogan was edged inside, however. I held out my identification wallet. Mrs. Laurette O. insisted on examining it with her delicate hands.

"Frankly," she said, "if you weren't a bit dark-complexioned you might pass for Henry Wilcox's younger brother."

"The violent type?"

"I wouldn't want to meet either of you on a dark street."

Laurette, ten years younger than Miss Editha, was possibly fiftyish. She was a skinny blonde with a faded complexion. I had caught her on a night when the doctor-husband was out and when she had no inclination "to put on her face."

I remarked that while Miss Editha had noted a slight resemblance between Henry and myself she hadn't seemed frightened of me.

"Editha is easily duped by the Henry Wilcox type," said Laurette. "It was I who aroused her suspicions, persuaded her to write your chief inspector. But when Editha's book was returned, she forgot how Henry had buried his dear little wife in the cellar."

"He—what?"

"Poured a new concrete cellar floor on top of dear little Winona."

"Who told you about the cement?"

"Nobody."

"Where did you get such an idea?"

"Isn't that the way his type gets rid of a wife?"

"How do you know there was a murder?"

"Intuition. I just know that Winona never went off to New Orleans by herself. I am positive that Henry Wilcox strangled her and buried the body under concrete. It's the almost perfect way to hide a victim."

It took but a little cross-examination to determine that Mrs. Oliver lived on a daily diet of fictional murders. She was a one-a-day reader, nearly seven thousand during the last twenty years. All Mrs. Oliver seemingly had to go on in this case was a physical dislike of big Henry Wilcox, the indirect return of the hand-tooled morocco treasure and one new fact—Winona had stood her up on a date.

The two had planned to visit the paperback gallery at the college, which might have something special on Katherine Mansfield. At the least it had a better collection of the more literate thrillers than any other store in town.

There were a couple of unusual circumstances about the standup.

Winona Wilcox didn't have a car of her own or a license to drive: it was another phase of her being a dependent woman. Mrs. Oliver had agreed to be chauffeur for the paperback gallery visit. Strangely, Mrs. Oliver had been asked to call, not at the Wilcox home on Maple Avenue, but at a corner drugstore a block and a half away.

Not counting the five minutes that she was early, Laurette Oliver waited through three cigarettes and two Cokes, making numerous vain attempts to telephone the Wilcox home. She finally went to the bungalow and almost wore down the doorbell.

"No woman," said Mrs. Oliver, "ever willingly stands up another on a planned shopping trip. And no college-educated housewife, who stays home all day, would pass up a chance to visit such a fabulous place as the paperback gallery."

"Maybe she'd seen others before she moved to Portchester."

"She'd then be even more eager to go. Don't you realize that a paperback gallery in a few months' time gets in rows and rows of new books, hundreds of intriguingly different titles? The nightmare of every literate housewife is to come to the end of a good novel, have no other new one available and be faced with the necessity to turn on an afternoon TV soaper. No, Mr. Ferrari, I assure you that Winona didn't stand me up willingly."

"Did you try to phone her later?"

"I called thirty times and finally got Wilcox. First he said Winona

was out and then that she'd gone away and wouldn't be back."

"Were those his exact words——'wouldn't be back'?"

"With a note of finality. Nothing about New Orleans or visiting a sick aunt."

"Did you ever call at the Wilcox home afterwards?"

"Just thinking about facing that big gorilla gives me the creeps."

"And I resemble him, eh?"

"Well, after you get talking, you do have a certain charm."

"Maybe he does, too. Did you see him at the lectures?"

"Not until the third night. Editha and I were standing outside on the stoop, having cigarettes and guessing how many more would show up. I had a feeling that Winona was going to be one of the faithfuls. She'd asked a very good question at the second lecture. My heart leaped when I saw her returning. I exclaimed to Editha, 'Why, there's that dear, little thing and look at that big gorilla who's driving her.' "

"How did you finally get acquainted?"

"Mr. Wilcox wasn't picking Winona up that night. She was certain one of us would help out a little woman who didn't have her own car. She mentioned her plight to me—the first time she'd spoken to anyone outside of asking that question of the lecturer. That's when I suggested having coffee together. In chauffering her home, I made the paperback gallery date. Editha was teaching school and so it couldn't be a threesome."

"You said she didn't speak to anyone else?"

"Come to think of it, she did congratulate Dr. Alice Hamilton, the lecturer. But the only remark she made to any one else was a comment about how poignant the lecture was. K. M., you know, was a tragic figure, dying of tuberculosis at the height of her promise."

Laurette Oliver loaned me the negative of a group snapshot in which Winona was a tiny head; when blown up it might be helpful.

MY NEXT CALLS were blanks. Wilcox wasn't home and the houses on both sides of his were also dark. The substitute pharmacist at the corner drugstore couldn't recall seeing either of the Wilcoxes. For no real reason. I decided to call Theresa.

I stepped into a phone booth, dropped in a dime but broke off in the midst of dialing. I lit a cigarette, debated a course of action.

When the booth became smoky, I squashed out the butt and pulled out the jeweler's box. The diamond was a full caret and a half, a $799 value marked down to $599 by a jeweler who owed me a favor. I studied the reflections for a few minutes, pictured the delight that would sparkle in Theresa's eyes and then snapped the box shut.

I hadn't told Theresa about the sparkler yet and shouldn't do so to-

night. I should wait another week, possibly for a couple of weeks. On one level my mind multiplied arguments for delay; on another my senses yearned for the secret pleasure my wanton saint would provide.

Spinning around, I went out into the cold. I was still feverish with desire. I got in, slammed the door and decided firmly that the night must be devoted to a stakeout.

It would be far easier, I knew from experience, to have some words with Wilcox and his neighbors sometime between ten up to even two or three than on a hangoverish morning when they were rushing off to work.

Maple Avenue had been developed some forty years ago. That was before the Cape Cod revival, with its lumber-saving economies, banished the porch. The Wilcox house was a one and a half story bungalow with a dormer window in the attic. I could imagine Winona weeding the petunias, spraying the rambler roses and then enjoying a "sit" in the rocking chair on the porch. It was the New England way of seeing the comings and goings without pushing aside curtains and spying.

The temperature was dropping towards zero; that meant calling attention to my stakeout car by keeping the motor going to get heat. The sports news was so skimpy I had to listen to yah-yahing teen-age music to avoid thinking about my relationship with Theresa. An hour and a half of sitting in a parked car on a zero night ranges from tiresome to the bottomless pit of boredom.

The four Taylors, the family in the bungalow on the left, were the first to come home. The pictures hadn't gotten out until 11:15 and they had stopped for sundaes. Young Miss Taylor didn't know anything about the Wilcoxes because they didn't have any kids in the two most important grades, freshman and soph at Portchester High.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Wilcox was in real estate. "He boasted of one deal. He bought the rundown O'Reilly Place, a mile down the avenue; gave it a paint job, most of which he did himself, and said he made a $1,500 profit in three months. Wish I could pick up some spare change like that. Wilcox is now doing over his own house and probably will sell it once he gives it an outside coat."

"So he's planning to move?"

"That seems to be his pattern."

"Has he been pouring a concrete floor for the cellar?"

"Hell, he wouldn't do anything so foolish in a seaport town. When these houses were built, forty or fifty years ago, at least half of the cellar floors were left in dirt so they could absorb excess water if we got very high tides, flash floods or hurricane rains. The modern fools, who put in all cement floors, have

to install sump pumps; despite them, they get swamped."

The wife, Mrs. Taylor, had virtually nothing to contribute as she limited friendships to the mothers of other freshmen daughters and, besides, she had Granny to look after. Mrs. Wilcox had asked them—Mrs. Taylor and Granny—to go to some lecture series at the college but Granny had one of her bad days and it was "Peyton Place" night on television.

Henry Wilcox, I was certain, wasn't a weirdie who strangled women from some psychopathic impulse. There was something about a Winona-Theresa that both intrigued and upset a strong, healthy man. She appealed to one's protective instincts and yet she also wanted—I shook my head, tried not to think about Theresa in her wanton moments.

As I went back to the stakeout car, the lights flashed off in the top story tenement to the right. The family had returned while I was with the Taylors but now refused to answer my buzzing. I was shivering outside, making a nuisance of myself with the bell for the last time, when Wilcox drove up.

Everyone was a policy of self-justification; it's a striking commentary on mine that, but for the interviews, I would never have considered Wilcox as frightening. As Miss Editha had added in her qualifications, he was by no means my double. But there was no mistaking a general type of big hairy bears who frightened some delicate women like Laurette Oliver but attracted even more fragile ones like Theresa and the missing Winona Wilcox.

Wilcox, seemingly, was a big softie, who was often hurt because some women instinctively disliked him. He was a sucker for a shrewd little woman with a good line of sympathy talk. But Wilcox also, like so many of us, had a ruthless streak. I don't mean that he was a potential gangster or thug; he was a man toughened by the day-to-day battles in the business world and who was more than a bit ruthless in his determination to come out on top.

Now he was mellow. He apologized for coming home late by saying he had attended a real estate men's racket. In the low voice of an experienced salesman he claimed he wasn't a broker; possibly he just didn't have a license in Connecticut. He claimed he lacked the patience to show endless people around to available houses and did not have the necessary gift of malarkey. He described himself as a wheeler-dealer who fixed up houses and let better talkers, the brokers, sell them for him. He seemed on the verge of offering some wonderful bargain and then turned sardonic.

"I like to do things with my hands," he said quietly. "I like to dig. I enjoy mixing cement and

pouring it over just part of a cellar floor. Never a whole floor, of course, in these low-level seaport towns."

He gave me the requested New Orleans address of his wife's aunt and then said, "I don't think she'll be back, not ever. That's why I was abrupt with the old maids of the Katherine Mansfield Nocturnal Adoration Society. The real truth is that my wife up and left me. How does one explain that to casual acquaintances? If I'd been cleverer when the old maids first called, I'd have cooked up a story about getting an emergency telegram from a sick relative."

"So she doesn't have an aunt?"

"She does, in New Orleans. That's where I met her. The aunt's address is genuine. I don't know of any other relatives she's got except kissing cousins. But I won't guarantee that she went to her aunt's. Maybe she lit out with a more bookish guy."

"What type of work does she do?"

"She's a Southern lady with a little money. Her old man ran a speak during Prohibition and then was a legit saloon keep. He left her four two-family houses. The rentals should have kept her comfortable if she hadn't met the big mouth who became her first husband. He was so anxious to get his hands on ready money that he persuaded her to sell three at sacrifices."

Wilcox boasted he had fixed up the one remaining house and sold it at a profit for Winona. They had journeyed north to Portchester because a second aunt, widow of a shipyard welder, had died and left Winona two rundown clapboard tenements. Both eventually netted modest profits.

"You know," he added, "that you haven't got any court order. I don't have to reveal any details of my wife's finances just because of some dried up spinster wife who's been making her husband miserable for years."

"Who do you mean?"

"Don't play coy. You've heard the ravings about murdering a rich wife for her money. Come back tomorrow afternoon and I'll submit a complete financial statement that will wrap everything up even for the lavender and old lace gals."

He made an appointment to meet me in a bar and grill right here on Maple Avenue. From my squad car I called headquarters by short wave. I waited until a new stakeout came to relieve me. In the morning another man was to tail Wilcox if he went out.

When I reached my flat, the telephone was ringing. I took the receiver off the carriage and put a pillow over it to muffle Theresa's pleadings. Faint and far away I heard the frantic questions: "What happened? Are you there, Francisco?" She made a special point at times of using my old-country name. "You started to answer? Are

you hurt?" Then came the climactic, "Shall I come over?"

A cold sweat broke over me as I pictured St. Theresa barging in to the rescue at two. I reached under the pillow that had muffled so poorly. I answered that I had just staggered in, darling, and was utterly exhausted from a tough case. Theresa said she would hurry over just the same to make certain I wasn't hurt. Could it be she thought there was another woman in the flat or was she really worried over my health? To stall her I said I was dead on my feet, impotent. I felt I was still losing the argument and said recklessly that I had bought her a very special gift which could be presented only in special circumstances when there was a long evening ahead.

"It's something," I added, "that sparkles enough to make the other typists envious and may put the claims adjusters in their place in a back row."

Not until I hung up did my fagged brain realize that I had made a commitment prematurely.

BLACKIE'S BAR was a quiet neighborhood place. Wilcox was in a rear booth, nursing a glass of sherry and playing solitaire. He said he always spent an hour or two here before going home.

"Troubled by memories of Winona?" I asked.

"Hell, no. I got in the habit when she was still with me; it doesn't pay

to let a woman know you often knock off work at three or three-thirty o'clock in the afternoon. Winona was a dear little thing but I saw enough of her if I arrived home for dinner at six."

"What about evenings? I understand you didn't go to the Katherine Mansfield lectures."

"Did you? Winona and I always spent at least two nights together. We'd go out once a week to the movies and we'd always stay home one evening to watch Perry Mason."

Henry's story, backed by a dozen sheets of figures detailing realty deals and house-repairing costs, was that Winona had $8,000 in cash in two different banks and that she withdrew it just before her disappearance. Henry's total capital was approximately $7,000. Since it was winter, he hadn't invested it in a house to be fixed up. The only real estate currently owned was the Maple Avenue bungalow.

The deed was jointly in the names of Henry and Winona

Wilcox; that meant the husband couldn't sell the property until after proof of his wife's death or, in a possible disappearance case, until seven years had elapsed. It had a mortgage, of course; a wheeler-dealer kept everything mortgaged to leave cash for the next deal.

The various real estate transactions, I gathered, just about kept the Wilcoxes with operating funds and only occasionally added to capital in the banks. For example, the $1,500 profit on the sale of the O'Reilly house, cited by Neighbor Taylor, spelled $125 a week over a three-month period with no other income.

From a cop's viewpoint, it was probable that Henry stole from his wife all of the $7,000 banked under his name. There was a good chance that the $8,000 supposedly withdrawn by Winona for get-away money actually was taken out at Wilcox's plea that it was needed for a hot realty deal. Possibly it was secreted in a safe deposit box under a pseudonym.

The small equity in the Maple Avenue bungalow, supposedly lost unless Winona reappeared, actually was a good alibi for a suspected wife-killer. Wilcox hadn't taken out any life insurance on Winona; that might count as a second score for his innocence but it could also mean that no body was scheduled to be found.

It had to be admitted that Wilcox, at least two weeks before his wife's disappearance, did have $7,000 free and clear in the bank under his own name. Without disputing that another $8,000, all in one lump, is a motive for a small-town murder, the fact remained that he could have hoped to make that much on his next few realty transactions.

It seemed certain that if Wilcox killed his wife the reason wasn't wholly financial.

What had really happened? Subconsciously, I was beginning to suspect that I would find the real motive for murder in my own occasional reactions to my own little St. Theresa. That's why I was determined not to have another date with my recent delirious passion. I didn't trust myself to telephone Theresa that I couldn't see her for a couple of weeks. I wired her that I was called out of town. As a further precaution, I took a room in a waterfront hotel that was generally rented on an hourly basis.

For the first week that I stayed there I was competely stymied. The New Orleans police reported that Winona had never arrived in Louisiana; Wilcox's stories of realty deals there were confirmed. Winona's first husband had died in a hospital from galloping cancer and left no insurance. Winona's aunt was glad she had wed Henry; Winona needed somebody to look after her following her first costly marriage.

These were the only scraps of information I could ferret out. They weren't enough for the skipper to keep me on the case exclusively, not when there was a waterfront stabbing at least once a week and when the merchants were yelling for reinforcements on the Main Street burglary detail.

Day after day—devoting my own time—I questioned one person after another for possible leads until the total ran into the hundreds. Flashing blown-up reproductions of the sole snapshot available, I approached everyone who lived within a radius of a mile, the possible walking distance limit of a woman without a car. I quizzed people at the neighborhood supermarkets and the purchasers of the Wilcox houses.

I missed the one big clue until I returned to the Katherine Mansfield angle. Dr. Alice Hamilton, a member of the local college's faculty, almost knocked me over with the news that the lecture series was made possible by a $1,000 grant from Winona Wilcox.

"I can't understand," said Dr. Hamilton, "why she didn't attend the last lecture."

My skipper and the chief understood. That was when they authorized drastic measures: we secured court orders to break up the partial cement floors in the cellars of every house that Wilcox owned in Portchester. We had laborers dig eight feet deep down in the Maple Avenue bungalow and at least six feet in the others.

As soon as the spring thaw came we dug in the gardens in the rear of every house. And we got no place.

Winona might have been given not the cement tomb treatment but the cement overcoat long favored by the underworld. The little woman could have been jammed into a small box, weighted down with concrete and dropped into the harbor on a dark night. Henry was husky enough to have done the job by himself.

I WAS on the verge of concluding that the case would never be solved when my own situation exploded. Theresa, eyes red from weeping, came to headquarters. Although I was talking to the skipper, she flung herself against me, sobbing and I had to curve an arm to prevent her from falling. She didn't break into hysterics; she dried her eyes quickly, but the skipper looked at me as if I had just taken advantage of his own and only little sister.

Winona agreed to go to the Italian Gardens, just down the block, and have some chianti and pizza while we talked things over. She wanted to know why I had failed to give her the diamond ring, which I had promised. She had taken me at my word and told all the girls and claims adjusters about it.

Theresa stressed that she had delayed for three weeks now be-

fore venturing to headquarters; she was not some hysterical hussy I ever need be ashamed of.

Trying another note, she confided that the insurance company had paid double indemnity on her late husband's automobile death and that meant $15,000 in cash. She also got a brand new $3,000 car, fully paid for, since the telescoped one had been in her husband's name under a policy that paid up three years of installments immediately.

Not many brides in our circles, she said, could promise a husband such nest eggs that could finance both a bay-front home and a honeymoon in Europe.

I tried to explain my obsession with the Wilcox case, that I couldn't marry her until I was certain that I wouldn't be seized with subconscious impulses I couldn't control—yes, even an impulse like that voiced in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*: killing the little thing I loved.

Theresa drew herself up erectly.

"Francisco Ferrari," she began. "Do you thing you can scare me off with a wild story that you're a potential murderer? Do you take me for such a ninny? I know now you have some other woman. You've probably been with her every other night for the past three weeks."

Theresa stood up, clutched her purse. "It's just four o'clock. I can still see my lawyers this afternoon. Francisco, if you won't immediately announce our engagement, I will be forced to file a breach of promise action asking for fifty thousand dollars damages. At the very least that will mean a twenty-five thousand dollars judgment. Just think, darling, I'll be able to have your pay attached for the next ten years."

Her judicial tone denied further appeal. My fragile saint was now the woman scorned and I was either going to have to pay through the nose or be led by the nose for life.

From utter desperation came a brainstorm. Four o'clock had another significance. I drove the still sputtering Theresa to the Maple Avenue bar and grill. In the familiar rear booth the man I sought was having his leisurely glass of sherry. He looked like a fugitive henpecked husband; not like a man who had murdered his wife. Anyone but yours truly would not have carried out the desperation-plan.

Henry Wilcox rose like a lumbering giant as we stopped beside his table. He towered over Theresa like I did. The fragile saint, that recently sweet-tempered child-widow, hardly came to our chests.

A strange look flashed over Henry's face; since he was ruddy-complexioned it could hardly be called a flush. For a split second he appeared to be seeing the ghost of Winona who, undoubtedly, was encased in a cement overcoat

sunken deep in the muck at the bottom of Portchester Harbor.

Henry had too much of a poker face to betray himself. There was just that split second of fright; looking down at Theresa, his expression changed to amazement and then admiration. Theresa, apparently, was a shade better looking than Winona appeared in the blown-up snapshot.

As for Theresa, she looked as if she were meeting a long-lost brother of mine. One who didn't have cauliflower ears and who might be more appreciative. Her dainty tongue, which only a few minutes earlier had still been viperish, moistened lips in a barely perceptible manner. Eyes animated with coquetry.

"Henry," I said, attempting a light touch. "I think you might be interested in meeting another Katherine Mansfield fan. This is Theresa. She's a widow who might be interested in investing insurance money in a good real estate deal.

"The two of you will discover another thing in common—a violent dislike for yours truly."

Here is the point to insert an alibi for my actions. I should say I hit on the confrontation as a means of breaking Henry Wilcox down and that I only desired to scare St. Theresa a bit by using her as bait. I should argue that I hoped the prospect that she would be occasionally used as a decoy, a clay pigeon, would be enough to disillusion her about marrying a detective.

The truth is that I had a strong hunch about what might happen. That's why I have used fictitious names in telling this story.

Postmarked from Idlewild Airport, a letter came a month later. Theresa wrote that they were heading west, hundreds of miles away from the horrid lies I spread about a man I once knew as Henry. No detectives far shrewder than I would be able to track them down, because both were adopting new names. Theresa said she was so convinced of Henry's innocence that, in spite of her religion, she had agreed to a common-law marriage for the seven years before the previous wife could be legally declared dead under the Enoch Arden law.

"Henry," she concluded, "is a man who really knows how to look after his wife who is helpless about many things. Henry doesn't have to put in the long hours and night work of some men I used to know. He has plenty of time to devote to me because he makes a comfortable living by investing his own money and mine *under our joint names*. We're equal partners."

The last sentence was a dirty dig: "He's a better lover than you were." The next to the final one, however, was the tipoff: "He has approximately the same amount of money as I have."

That meant he did have Win-

ona's missing $8,000. All told, counting Theresa's money, the wheeler-dealer had operating funds totaling some $30,000.

The second Mrs. Wilcox, I am certain, will vanish from the face of this earth in another five or six months. But what can I do now? How can I track Theresa down if I don't know either her new name or destination? I put out a skip-trace on her dreamboat: missing cars always can be bird-dogged unless professional auto thieves start to disguise them. I learned that Theresa's was sold in a Manhattan used car lot for cash and that the sellers left by the downtown subway. That left me completely stymied and so technically I am in the clear.

Remember, I never regarded Henry Wilcox as a monster, a sex-maniac or a mysterious strangler. He is a man very much like myself, who could be my own brother. Who could even be me. He'd be a perfectly normal guy if it wasn't for elf-like women named Winona and Theresa who look for gorilla-lovers to give them their kicks.

When I can't sleep at night, I try to tell myself that I won't be the one who will be repeatedly tempted to kill Theresa. I know how it will happen. Much as Henry Wilcox may be conditioned to mating with a child-wife, the time will come when he will want her to have mutual, mature enjoyment for a change. He will grow tired—oh, I know this too well—of having the frail little white body offered to the big bear, to the savage gorilla. He will grow sick of the perpetual entreaty that she can have enjoyment only as a simulated sacrificial victim.

On one dark night of frustration, he will be taunted once too often by her anguished cry: "Do something rough to me! Oh, you big gorilla, are you just a big teddybear stuffed with sawdust? Where's your manhood?"

Having experience as an occasional woman-killer, Wilcox will not act in anger. He will reflect on the extra bounty represented by her handy investment funds, all tax free. He won't hesitate then.

I know.

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ON SALE EVERYWHERE

THE GAP IN THE FENCE

by FRED S. TOBEY

On the edge of oblivion, a man and a woman fought their final battle. She, to save her son from any other woman; he—to save himself from Murder . . .

ALAN WELDON was nine years old when he first thought of killing his mother. Neither at the moment nor afterward did he fully understand the frightening impulse, unless it was on a certain day years later, and then quite briefly.

The Weldons lived in a small house high on a rocky outcropping by the ocean, less than an hour's drive from Boston, a house and land inherited from Mr. Weldon's parents.

Alan once overheard his mother say to a visitor that it certainly wasn't the best place in the world to live. He tried vainly to imagine what a better place would be like. Where would there be more blue crabs hiding in seaweed among the rocks? Where could there be another swimming pool as perfect as the quiet inlet where hot sands warmed the buoyant salt tide?

Alan's mother really had meant that an apartment in the city would have been less demanding of her, but of course Alan had no understanding of the problems of suburban housekeeping.

It did occur to him briefly that his mother might have been thinking of the old frame house when she said it was not the best place in the world to live, but even that seemed to him unlikely, because the house, guarded by tall maples, was delightfully cool in summer, and in the winter when northeast

storms lashed the coast it held special pleasures not afforded by ordinary houses.

Wise ancestors had built it in a sheltering hollow, away from the cliff's edge but near enough so that Alan, lying in bed on a howling January night, could hear the great waves lashing the base of the cliff, and feel the shivery joy of safe shelter in the midst of danger.

As for danger, the cliff itself was pure danger, acknowledged by all as such and therefore fascinating to any child. Almost straight down it went, fifty feet or more to where

the water lapped and battered it at high tide.

No one had ever climbed the face of it, either up or down, for it was far too steep. To descend to the beach one had to follow a winding path, along a meadow's edge and through a rocky cut.

An early father of the Weldon family, seeing the hazards of the cliff's edge, had built a strong wire fence along it, drilling holes in the rock to hold iron posts and setting the posts in lead to make them secure.

There was a gap in the fence where the wire had rusted through, and at this spot Alan liked to lie face down on a sunny day, with his head out in space and the stone pleasantly hot against the bare skin of his stomach, watching the waves as they vented their anger on the boulders directly beneath.

Alan's mother had urged his father unceasingly to mend the break in the wire before someone fell through and was killed, but though his father never quite got around to mending it, no one ever fell through, perhaps because the ragged edges of the wire made the danger so obvious.

It was here at the cliff's edge, at the place where the wire was rusted and broken away, that the child had the shocking urge, one day, to kill his mother.

His father's funeral had taken place only that afternoon, and there was a strangeness about his mother that Alan found disturbing. In the familiar gentleness with which the frail woman directed his activities he sensed a new quality, a stronger expression of will turned now from the father toward him, the child.

Alan had not known his father very well, and he had not wanted to go to the funeral, though he understood that it was required and went without much complaining. Never to see his father again would be to see him only a little less than usual, hardly enough difference to justify all the dressing up.

Alan's father had been, to his only child, a shadowy, ineffectual person who worked long hours at his office in the city and was quite busy with the church and his lodge on week-ends. When his father was at home it seemed to Alan that his mother talked to him incessantly in her soft plaintive voice, calling the roll of chores waiting to be done on the house and around the grounds.

Father and son knew each other so little that when Alan paused beside his mother at the casket, looking down at the waxen face with its neat sandy moustache and strangely smooth cheeks, he felt almost no stirring of emotion.

"The boy has his mother's look, don't you think?" whispered a relative to her husband.

"In a way, perhaps," the husband replied. "I suppose you mean the dark hair and the small fea-

tures. But he's big like his father, and quiet like him."

His wife said, "John Weldon wasn't always so quiet. That woman could quiet anyone, if you ask me, though you'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

When the funeral was over and Alan's mother had said her farewells to the relatives, she drove Alan home in the five-year-old sedan that the father had left them. She paused to look at the house before going inside.

"We should have moved to the city long ago," she said, viewing the faded exterior from the gravel walk. "Now we're saddled with an old relic. Who will want it in this condition?"

His mother's words embarrassed Alan, for he was not accustomed to have her speak to him of such matters, and he sidled away.

"Where are you going?" said his mother.

"Down to the beach,'" said Alan, "to look for crabs in the seaweed."

"I'll go with you," said his mother. "I want to see what it is that you find so fascinating."

Alan was surprised, because his mother nearly always found reasons not to traverse the stony path that led down to the water.

"Come on, then," he said, and started toward the cliff's edge, where the path began.

When they came to the place where the wire fence was rusted away, the mother's hand reached out to take her son's arm, and her fingers tightened possessively.

"This is terribly dangerous," she said, stopping. "I wish your father could have got around to mending the fence as I asked him to." She looked down at Alan. "Perhaps you will fix it yourself some day," she said, "when you are a little older."

From far below came the sound of a wave smashing against the rock face of the cliff. Suddenly Alan was overwhelmed by a feeling that he must wrench his arm free from his mother's grasp and push her with all his might through the gap in the fence.

He never was quite certain how close he came to doing it, but the urge passed and after a second or two of horrified immobilization he turned and without a word ran back to the house, jumping into his bed with all his clothes on and pulling the covers up over his head. Neither his mother nor anyone else ever persuaded him to say what had come over him that day.

ONE FRIDAY night in June some years later, when Alan was twenty-three, he found himself, rather to his surprise, entertaining a girl named Helen Collins in his furnished room in the city. They had gone there to have a nightcap after seeing a show.

They had gone to the room, Alan had mixed the nightcap, and

now, with no more than half of it gone, Helen was in Alan's arms, murmuring rueful words against his shoulder while he stroked her hair with childlike tenderness.

"You probably won't want to take me out again," said Helen. "I know this is terrible tactics on a first date, coming here to your room like this, but it just seemed so natural, somehow, with you.

"Alan, did you know I was married when I was nineteen? He was a football-hero type and it was a miserable mess and we were divorced, and I haven't been out with a man in two years. I haven't wanted to. But I wanted to go out with you and I wanted to come home with you. Do you mind, Alan?"

"Mind?" said Alan. "Do I *mind?*" In the absence of words to express his gratitude and affection, he began kissing her hair, her shoulders, and her lips. Few coherent words occurred to either of them after that, until dawn began to brighten the windows.

Over coffee Saturday morning they looked affectionately at each other and talked of personal things. Helen, who was a secretary in the advertising agency where Alan worked as an illustrator, had seemed to him a shy girl, rather out of step with the free-wheeling atmosphere of the agency.

The other men of the office treated her as a sort of decorative machine, but between her and Alan some obscure chemistry had begun to function the first time their eyes met.

Alan got up to refill his coffee cup. While his back was turned he said, "Helen, I was married, too."

"You *were?*" said Helen. "Well, that is a surprise. What happened? Did you get a divorce, too?"

"Oh, yes," said Alan. "She was quite a strange person, really, though very beautiful. In a way, that is," he added hastily. "Not the way you are, Helen. She was Oriental."

Helen put down her coffee.

"Now you really have me going," she said. "Some how I can't quite picture you—" She broke off.

"It was a mistake," said Alan. "I was overseas and got wounded. That's what gave me the slight limp you might have noticed. There was a native girl—a sort of practical nurse we'd call her over here—in the hospital. I guess my values were confused, as Mother put it, and—well, when I got out of the hospital I married her and brought her back here."

"And it didn't work out? What went wrong?"

"She and Mother had a big blowup," said Alan.

He paused, sensing from Helen's silence that what he had said was either unacceptable or insufficient. "Of course that wasn't the whole story," he added. "She was a strange person. Vindictive, I guess you'd say.

"You see, my father died when I was nine, and that left just Mother and me. Mother got me through high school somehow by pinching on expenses, but after that I thought I might as well take my stint in the service right away. They were going to grab me anyway, I didn't have any money for college.

"That's how I got overseas and met this girl. The bullet in the leg got me a discharge and we came back here and moved in with Mother and I started going to art school on the G. I. bill. I always wanted to be a painter. In high school I won a couple of prizes in the art course. I guess I wasn't too bad.

"Mother said she thought portrait painters did very well, and anyway I guess she kind of liked the idea of having an artist in the family. Mother is like that. What are you grinning about?"

Helen's face had broken into a broad smile.

"Forgive me," she said. "I'm sorry, Alan. I couldn't help it. When you said 'portrait painter' I saw a flash of that job you were doing at the agency yesterday—the one for the new rear-end falsies."

Alan looked hurt, Helen stopped smiling, and for a moment there was a tenseness, then Alan relaxed and began to grin.

"I had to quit doing portraits and start making some money," he said. "But I don't think my painting was too bad. I did one of Mother my

last year in art school, and she really liked it, said it looked just the way she always wanted me to think of her—genteel and delicate.

"But she wasn't so happy about the portrait of my wife." Alan paused, reflecting. "Boy, was that ever a day, when I showed her that one!"

"Was the portrait really so awful?" said Helen.

"Well, no, just the opposite, in a way," said Alan. "Mother thought it was too good a representation. She said, 'Alan, couldn't you have lightened up the skin color a little and made the eyes look less slanty? I know it isn't the girl's fault that she looks that way, but isn't an artist allowed to take a few liberties to gloss over that sort of thing?' "

"What was your answer to that?" said Helen. She was looking searchingly at Alan.

"I didn't get a chance to answer," said Alan. "My wife came barging in and began laying Mother out in lavender. Holy smoke! I don't know where she got the words. Some English and some her own. It seemed she'd been just outside the door and heard what Mother said.

"She screamed that Mother knew she was there and wanted her to hear it, said Mother had been plotting all along to get her out of the house. Then she swung on me and told me I was a fool for not knowing it."

"How did your mother take all this?"

"She just sat there weeping through the whole thing. It made a complete wreck of her for a couple of days. Of course she never did like this girl, I realize that, but I guess most people her age have got their prejudices.

"And after all, she did take us both in when I came back from overseas, and gave us the room she and Dad used to have—said my old room was big enough for her now that she was alone. So I guess she had a right to feel hurt."

"Was that when things broke up?"

Pretty much. We never really did get together after that. My wife left a few weeks later, and then we got a divorce. She was very vindictive."

Helen looked troubled, but after a moment her face cleared and she smiled at Alan affectionately.

"I guess mixed marriages are pretty difficult," she said.

Alan took Helen Collins with him when he went to visit his mother the next weekend. It seemed to him that the two women got along well together from the start, and that pleased him. Toward the end of the day he took Helen down the steep path to the beach, and when they climbed back up they stopped at the place by the cliff's edge, where the wire fence was rusted away.

"My father was supposed to mend it," said Alan, "but he never did. I suppose I should have been grateful to him, because this used to be my favorite spot. It was the only place where I could lie down and watch the breakers."

He dropped to his knees, then stretched himself prone on the warm rock, his head out over the edge.

"Lie down beside me," he said. "See how exciting it is down there."

Like children they lay side by side, face downward, delighting in the sounds of the surf and the sight of the water foaming and swirling around the big rocks far below.

"I'm a little bit surprised that you aren't still living out here," said Helen. "How did you happen to move in town?"

"Well, first I started doing some part time work for the agency," said Alan, "because we were all out of money and I wasn't getting much of anywhere doing portraits and landscapes.

"Then the agency offered me full time work, and I took it. That was when I moved in town. Mother said it was foolish, but it saved me a lot of driving, and I really wasn't sorry to get off on my own a little. Of course I still come out

weekends. Mother isn't getting any younger, and she needs help."

Helen moved close enough to brush her lips lightly against Alan's.

"I like you, Alan," she said.

"I'm glad," said Alan. "But why do you? Around the office you've got the reputation of being a man-hater."

"I know it," said Helen. "I wanted it that way. I didn't think I'd ever find another man I cared about. But I liked you from the minute you came in the office. And then that first night at your room was so wonderful and natural, not a bit as if we hadn't ever been together before."

They locked fingers and fell silent, watching the surf. The tide was part way in; the waves attacked the rocks with angry persistence.

"It's beautiful," said Helen at last, "but scary, too. Look at this one coming. I'd hate to be sitting on one of those rocks when that one breaks."

"You can hear the big ones smashing against the cliff when you're in bed at night," said Alan, "when it's warm and the windows are open."

"Speaking of that," said Helen, "are we staying over tonight or going back to the city? You said you weren't sure, so I packed my overnight things."

"Let's stay tonight," said Alan. "Mother wants us to."

WHEN ALAN told his mother, a few weeks later, that he and Helen were going to be married, his mother greeted the news with mild remonstrance.

"Do you really feel you've known her long enough?" she said. "Remember the mistake you made the first time by being hasty."

"But Mother," Alan protested, "I thought you liked Helen."

"I do like her," his mother said, with a show of patience, "I just wonder if you should be in quite such a hurry after your first experience. Are you sure Helen would be satisfied to live out here, when she's been used to the city?"

For a moment Alan could find no words.

"Mother," he said at last, "I thought you would understand that we don't plan to live out here. Helen wants an apartment in town. We'll visit you weekends, of course, but we won't be living out here."

It was his mother's turn to let the silence lengthen. She averted her head and for a moment Alan thought, with a sort of panic, that she might be crying. But when she turned back to look at him again, her eyes were dry.

"I'm not getting any younger, Alan," she said, "and I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to take care of this house by myself. I've been hoping you'd get tired of the city and want to move back here.

"Or perhaps, I thought, if you did well you might get a bigger place in town and ask me to keep house for you. But I won't worry. I know you'll do what's right, Alan, always."

On a Sunday morning two weeks later, Alan awoke with a severe headache and a vague but pervasive sense of doom. He sat up, fighting nausea, and let his feet drop over the side of the bed. Soon the nausea won and he sank back again, the room turning slowly, tilting as it turned. He closed his eyes, trying to banish the sight. The sickness slowly abated, but not the sense of disaster.

Alan sat up again, more cautiously this time, and after a bit he dared to rise to his feet and move slowly toward the bathroom. A cold washcloth on his face helped a little; a bromide helped more. He went to the table where he usually ate breakfast, sank into a chair and began trying to reconstruct the events of the night before.

He had gone to visit his mother in the afternoon. He went alone, because Helen said she had been visiting his mother too much. He and Helen had parted with a feeling of tension, though without a real quarrel. She said she would find something else to do for the evening—no doubt his mother would want him to stay overnight.

He remembered saying that if it was that easy to get along without him, perhaps he *would* stay overnight. And he had meant to stay.

But from the moment he arrived at his mother's, late in the afternoon, he felt an increasing sense of resentment against the way his life was going. One thing he knew: he wanted to be with Helen, not with his mother.

He did not want Helen finding something else to do in town, someone else to be with. But his mother had never been more considerate, more anxious to know how he liked the dinner, never more interested in each detail of his work, his health, his evenings with Helen. He felt enmeshed in a spreading web of maternal kindness.

All at once he rose from the dinner table and without a word strode out of the house into the summer night. He stopped fifty feet away and stood in silence, clenching and unclenching his hands, breathing heavily. In a moment he became aware that his mother had followed him and was standing near.

"Alan, Alan," she said. "Are you ill? What's the matter?"

"The matter," said Alan, his voice growing louder as he spoke until it was almost a shout, "The matter, Mother, is that I've got to get away. I've got to get away, do you hear? Away!"

"Away, dear?" said his mother. "Away from what?"

Alan made no reply, but stood motionless, except for his labored

breathing, until he had regained a measure of composure. Then he turned toward his automobile, which stood nearby in the driveway.

"I'm going back to town," he said, "and find Helen."

That much he remembered clearly now, that much and more: the ride back to town, the visit to Helen's empty apartment, the futile phone calls to friends she might be visiting.

The decision to step into a bar and see if a few drinks would improve his outlook.

All of that he now recalled. The drinks at the bar—how many? Too many, obviously, but he had lost track. And what had happened next? He had got home, certainly, but had he gone somewhere else first?

Fingers of memory probed along the borders of his consciousness, seeking a path into the present. Full recollection seemed imminent, and now the nausea returned and perspiration broke out on his forehead. Memory retreated but he knew it would be back. He knew, because on another morning a few weeks earlier, he had lived step by step through a similar experience.

That earlier time there hadn't been the sense of disaster, though, only of mystery, and he hadn't been afraid to remember, and when the recollection came at last it was of something quite innocent, only a dream after all, a dream in which he was able to rise at will into the air.

The gradual remembrance of it, the joy of moving through space as he chose while his mother and the others watched from below, had filled his being with a delicious warmth. Sitting on the side of the bed that day, remembering his

dream, how he had willed himself to rise, and then up, up, so gently floating away from the earth, Alan had let his waking mind turn, as in the dream, toward a secure knowledge of his weightlessness.

The quiet wave had begun to engulf him delightfully when all at once his eyes had come into focus on his image in a full length mirror on the bathroom door, and he had seen himself puffy-eyed and ridiculous. The sight had put an abrupt end, for that day at least, to any mating of dream and reality.

Now suddenly he knew why this morning's recollection, unlike that earlier one, was being ushered in by a sense of doom, for he was remembering that he had not gone directly home after getting drunk in the bar. He had got in his car and started driving at breakneck speed.

It must have been very late; the rocketing journey had taken him down a straight empty highway and then there had been a screaming slow-down, an exit and a wild series of turns that brought him all at once into the yard of his mother's house.

His mother was waiting at the door. She did not seem to know that he had been drinking.

"Why did you come back, Alan?" she asked.

"I forgot something, something I must show you," he said. "Come out to the cliff."

They walked together in the darkness to the cliff's edge, to the gap in the fence where the wire had rusted through.

"What do you want to show me?" said his mother.

"This," said Alan. He put both hands against his mother's frail back and pushed her into the void above the pounding surf.

"Now you see that I have a will of my own," he said.

The jangling of the telephone on the table in front of him made Alan's body jerk as if it had been hit by a bullet. The phone rang again and his hand went out and rested on it, but he began to shake and he drew the hand back. Was it his mother calling, as she always did on Sunday morning, or would it be the police?

The phone stopped ringing. Alan got up and moved to the bed, where he lay, still half drunk, his head pounding. The room was turning and tilting again. He closed his eyes, but the unstable world would not be shut out.

A persistently recurring sound brought him back from semi-consciousness. The phone again? No, this time it was the doorbell. Alan lay where he was, and presently the doorbell stopped ringing.

There was a knock at the door, followed by the scratching of a key in the lock. Alan had managed to get to a sitting position by the time Helen got the door open and began calling his name. She hurried to the bed and put an arm around him.

"What's wrong, Alan?" she said. "I thought you were at your mother's, but when I phoned her this morning she said you had decided—"

Alan clutched at her. His fingernails dug into her arm.

"You talked to Mother?" he said. "This morning?"

"Of course," said Helen. "Then I phoned you here and there wasn't any answer and I got worried, so I came over. Are you sick, Alan?"

His painful grip on her arm relaxed.

"Never mind," he said. "It's nothing. I'll be all right now. Never mind."

The next weekend got off to a much happier start, and possibly it would have ended on the same cheerful note had not an incredi-

ble thing occurred—incredible, that is, in the way it turned the relationships topsy-turvy; in other respects the incident was quite ordinary, however unpleasant.

Helen sprained her ankle and had to be taken care of by Alan's mother.

On the way down to the beach Saturday evening, stepping on the rough stones of the steep path in the half-light, Helen missed her footing and fell, twisting her right foot under her. When Alan tried to pick her up, she screamed and her face went white.

The doctor said the damage to the ligaments was especially severe because of a weakness caused by previous sprains. It would be weeks or perhaps months, he thought, before she would be able to walk without a crutch or a cane, and for a while she would have to stay off the foot completely.

She really ought to be in a hospital, he said, but if there were somewhere that she could have constant care—

"I'll take care of her," said Alan's mother promptly. "She can stay here."

"That's ridiculous," said Alan. He felt a disquieting alarm at the turn of the conversation. "You couldn't possibly do that, Mother. You're barely able to take care of yourself."

"People can do a lot of things when duty demands it," said his mother. "I'll manage."

She did manage, with an energy astonishingly revitalized by the new responsibility, and Helen could not have had better care had she been in a convalescent hospital. But from the time Helen was able to put the crutch away for a few hours each day, the mother's new-found stamina left her.

It was now her turn to look for attention from morning till night. For a week or two Helen rendered the service gladly, to the best of her limited ability, but there came a night when she went to Alan in desperation.

"Alan, I've got to leave here," she said. "I don't quite know how to explain it, but your mother and I are heading for some sort of emotional explosion. Of course I'm grateful to her for what she did, I want to do all I can, but Alan—" Alan looked up to see with dismay that tears were running down her cheeks. "I'm not ready to settle down to being a nursemaid. Aren't you and I entitled to a life of our own?"

Alan took her in his arms to comfort her, but his tone, when he spoke, was bitter.

"I thought we *were* going to have a life of our own. We said we wouldn't let anything stop us. But how can we leave Mother alone here now after all she's done for you?"

Helen drew away.

"After all she's done for me?" she said. "That's odd. Those are

just the words she used today; 'After all I've done for you.' Oh, Alan, I *am* grateful, but we can't live here."

"I'll talk to Mother," said Alan.

He found his mother sitting pale and dejected in her room. As he stood before her, trying miserably to find words for a beginning, she put her hands on the arms of her rocker and pushed herself to her feet.

"I need some air, Alan," she said. "Help me outside."

In silence he took her arms and guided her to the front porch. He expected her to stop there, but she went on, picking her way down the two steps to the ground and turning toward the sea. The night air was warm, but gusts of wind rustled the big maples and clouds scudded across the face of the waning moon. In the fitful moonlight they walked to the cliff's edge, to the place where the fence was broken away.

"I wanted to hear the water," said Alan's mother. "Alan?"

"What is it, Mother?"

"Alan, Helen said strange things to me today. She said I was selfish not to let you go. After all I've done for her. Alan?" The fingers plucked more urgently. "Alan, you won't leave me?"

Alan held his arms rigidly at his sides. Remembering his dream, the horror of recollection and the remorse, he wanted to turn and run, run again from the bare cliff's edge that was no more than two feet away from them, but he could only stand in silence, for his mother's eyes were fixed on him.

The ocean filled the air with the sound of its beating, and now blending with this was a new sound, the rushing of a high gust of wind through the trees. The wind bent the tall dry grass as it swept toward them, and when it reached them it caught and swayed the mother's slender figure as easily as the grass.

Alan saw her, through no act of his now, on the verge of a destruction he had twice pictured, and for an instant his hands remained immobile, offering no aid, while his conscience with infinite speed searched a million corners of his mind to reveal to him that the non-act would haunt him even more terribly than the matricide he had imagined.

The judgment thus made and delivered in less time than it takes a slender form to topple in the wind, Alan's hands darted out and he drew his mother back from the cliff's edge.

They stood so for a moment together and then Alan began to laugh, and when it seemed he would never stop laughing, his mother said, "Alan, Alan, have you gone mad?"

He did not answer, but holding tightly still to his mother's frail arms, leaped with all his strength into the blackness.

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Featuring

ED NOON

THE PHONE rang high and shrill at midnight. It had to be trouble. It was.

"Noon?" a familiar foghorn blasted in my ear.

I'm a light sleeper. I got unfogged quickly and leafed through memory's pages for the odd voice.

"Is this you, Memo?"

"What a memory. Maybe better than mine. You got a dame with you?"

I laughed. "Flying solo tonight. What's up?"

"Want you to meet me in Downey's soon as you can. Sorry I woke you up, but this can't keep. My number's on the board and I need a pal."

"You got one. Give me a half hour."

All the way downtown in a cab that seemed to zip like a bat, I thought about Memo Morgan. Broadway's Mr. Memory was a legend out of a Damon Runyon story. Nobody knew who he was, what he was, or where he really came from, but for ten years he had won prizes, wowed them on TV and stunned them in the sticks with the most fabulous memory of all time. A photographic memory.

Some People Kill People

We had hit a killer where it hurt, and every gorilla on Broadway was hunting our scalps. But we had one last chance to live . . .

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

I wondered what had come up. When a guy has a mind like an IBM machine, there could be a million angles. Memo Morgan was a walking secret weapon.

Downey's was jammed when I got there. The theatres had broke, the shows done. The thirsty, the famous and the hopefuls were standing around in one of the most famous theatrical watering holes off Times Square.

I didn't check my hat but walked

to the bar. Memo Morgan's outlandish sports coat, more horse blanket than clothing, guided me. His lumpy face and solid nose was parked moodily above a schooner of beer. He was alone. There were spaces on either side of him at the long brown bar.

I signaled the barkeep for a Scotch and sat down on Morgan's left. We were both now facing the entrance to Jim Downey's. A high panel of wood separated us from the dining room and the tabled customers.

"Thanks for the quick service, Noon."

"Tell me what I'm delivering," I said.

He nodded, his dog-like eyes roving over the bar. He licked his lower lip and fingered his nice, solid nose. There was a lump just below the bridge, where he had lost an argument with one of the tougher bookies in town.

Morgan hadn't welched. He had just refused to memorize a tote board.

"Ever hear of Wheels Wilson?"

I put down my Scotch. "What the hell do you have to do with him? Ask me if I heard of Jimmy Hoffa."

Memo Morgan winced. "Okay. So you know. Well, here it is. Wheels sent a muscle boy around last week, made me a proposition. Wanted me to read a stack of sheets. Some kind of confidential report that can't be moved from where it is. I refused. Wheels offered me a mint for the job."

"Go on."

"I got until one-thirty tonight to make up my mind. Right here in this place. Wheels' boy is coming for my answer. It's still no but I'm a little nervous, you understand. The gorilla is not only a gorilla, he's a monster. I want you to keep me in one piece while I tell him no dice. You dig?"

"Dug. Two questions."

"Shoot."

"Why didn't you run?"

"I couldn't run that far. Wheels has arms reaching into every state in the Union. And that includes Hawaii and Alaska."

"Why didn't you go to the law?"

He winced again, as if the beer was lousy.

"You know better than that, Noon. As crooked and rotten as Wheels Wilson is, I blow the whistle on him and I'm dead in this town. Even with the squares. You know the code. Nobody likes a fink."

I finished the Scotch, ordered another. Memo didn't want any more beer, content to nurse the one he had.

"Doesn't make sense," I said.

He looked at me sourly. "Meaning?"

"You can't run, you won't squeal and yet you're still going to say no business. What happens then? I can keep one gorilla from killing you but is it going to stop there?

You must have something up your sleeve."

He smiled then. His slow, breaking smile, the same smile that millions of TV viewers had seen. You just knew he had the answer.

"Smart. Real smart. You always had the noodle, shamus. No wonder you rate in this town. Maybe you can help me give Wheels the scoop."

"And what might that scoop be, Memo?"

"Wait," he growled. "You'll see. At one-thirty, you play it by ear."

"You're not going to tell me what Wheels wanted you to memorize, I take it."

"You take it just right."

"Cheers," I said and sipped some more Scotch.

The gorilla came as advertised.

At one-thirty on the nose, he lumbered into the bar, spotted us and moved with the ease of a destroyer through the crowded floor and settled himself mountainously down on the stool opposite Memo Morgan.

His clothes were faultless. Brooks Brothers, charcoal grey. A neat Borsalino crowned his head. His face was a reincarnation of the entire species of the anthropoid family. Bristling brows, nub of a nose, wide mouth bursting with even very white teeth.

Fine black hairs stubbled out from his coarse skin at random, unusual places.

His voice was the largest contradiction of all. Smooth, honeyed and uncommonly precise.

"It's one-thirty, Mr. Morgan. I hope you are ready with your reply to Mr. Wilson's offer."

I stared straight ahead as if I had no connection with Memo Morgan. Gorilla knew differently, though. His wide friendly smile, the one with all the teeth showing, had included me.

"No deal," Memo Morgan said.

"Say that again," the gorilla purred. "So I can be sure I haven't misheard you."

"No deal," Morgan repeated, in a flat, dead voice. "I'm not for sale. Not me or my memory. Tell Wheels I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" the gorilla echoed, his purr rising into a half-snarl. "I'd say that you are now a dead man, Mr. Morgan."

"You going to kill him in front of all these people?" I asked, swiveling on my chair. I stared past Morgan into the gorilla's face. The thick black eyebrows rose in a frown.

Memo leaned back against his own chair to give me room to talk. The chatter of voices and the clatter of glasses all over Downey's added a kind of discotheque flavor to our conversation.

"I might," the gorilla said, taking my measure. "What is your name, stranger?"

"Noon. Ed Noon."

"Are you law or just a big-nosed tourist?"

"Neither," I said. "But Morgan is a friend of mine. Whatever you try to do to him, you'll have to do to me too."

The gorilla stopped smiling. "Buzz off, friend. I can't be bothered. Morgan and I will do the talking. Now kiss him good-by and go on about your business."

I got off my chair as if I was fully complying with his request. I picked up the glass of Scotch. It was on the rocks, the way I like it. Memo made a small frightened sound in his throat. I stepped around his chair, shrugging.

"Okay, Mr. Hyde," I said softly. "But next time, bring Dr. Jekyll with you. One of us sure could have used him—" Before the simian face could unravel that sally, I had flung the glass of Scotch right into his eyes. The stinging fluid, the remáinder of the ice, the works.

His hands went up to paw at his face in sheer reflex. By that time, I had jerked his chair out from under him. His tremendous weight did the rest. As he was heeling over sideways, I helped him the rest of the way by driving my right fist into his temple, just between his left eye and left ear.

He hit the floor like a baby grand falling. I swept up my chair, ready to crown him with it if he tried to rise. He didn't. He lay crumpled, out for a full count.

I took Memo Morgan's elbow. His lumpy face had paled. All about us, the bartenders were rushing over; conversations had skidded to a full stop. A woman giggled nervously and suddenly you could hear the cars going by on Eighth Avenue.

"Call a cop," I told the bartender. "This guy's carrying a gun and he tried to stick us up—"

With people staring, voices starting to ask a dozen questions and the bartender almost frozen with surprise, I hustled Memo Morgan out of Downey's. Everybody made way for us. We could have killed a man or been running off with the family jewels, but as is typical of most innocent bystanders, nobody lifted a finger to stop us. By the time we reached the front door, it could have been two other guys.

"Noon, Noon," Morgan moaned in the fresh night air. "That stunt is goin' to cost me. What did you accomplish? You roughed up one of Wheels' gorillas. You expect him to love me for that?"

"Hush up, now, and let's find a phone about a block away from here. Then you tell me how you were going to handle that monster. What's his name, by the way?"

"You wouldn't believe it."

"Try me anyway."

"Greg Walters. How's that for a handle for a mug like that?"

"You're right. I don't believe it."

We found a candy store with three booths. One was unoccupied. The toothy guy behind the counter made a face when he saw we hadn't come in to buy anything. Morgan

looked about as reliable as Greg Walters. The other two phone booths were packed with one frowsy blonde and a teen-age kid with a Beatle hairdo.

"What are you going to do, Noon?"

"Call Wheels Wilson."

He simply stared at me, open-mouthed.

"You're crazy. You really are crazy."

"Never mind that. Give me his number. They must have given it to you when they asked you about this deal."

Morgan was speechless. He shook his head and reached into his inside pocket. A scrap of paper, one of his famous memos was extended to me.

Morgan, the man with the million dollar memory, was famous for pockets that bulged with all kinds of trivia as well as useful information—everything from Garbo's shoe size to the color of President Johnson's eyes.

The number was a Beekman Place exchange. I dialed it rapidly. The phone rang about ten times before I got an answer.

"Yeah?" The voice had flunky and goon oozing out of every pore.

"I want to talk to Wheels."

"Who wants to talk to him?"

"Memo Morgan."

"Uh—wait a sec." There was a long pause. I waved through the glass at Memo Morgan, who was staring unhappily at a rack of men's adventure magazines dangling on the rack behind him.

A much smoother voice, the boss sound intact, came over the wire.

"Go ahead, Morgan."

"This isn't Morgan." I spoke quickly before he could hang up on me. "Ed Noon. I'm with Memo now. We'd like to come and see you. Find the time, Wheels, as late as it is. This is important."

There was another pause.

"Let me talk to Greg."

"You can't," I said. "I left him sleeping it off on the floor of Jim Downey's bar. That gun he's carrying will keep him in jail at least overnight. Do we see you or don't we?"

"Noon. Ed Noon. Do I know you?"

"I'm a private detective, Wheels. A personal friend of Captain Monks of Homicide. I even have some friends in City Hall."

Wheels Wilson laughed a humorless laugh.

"Flip guy, eh? Gutsy, too. Okay. You come on over. I'll tell you in advance. Morgan doesn't deliver, you both won't be walking out of here the way you came in."

"How sweet you are. See you in about twenty minutes."

When I rejoined Memo Morgan, his face was considerably whiter than his horse blanket sports coat. His little eyes were jumping and the big thumbs of both hands were doing adagios of fear.

"What was that all about?"

"We're going to see Wheels Wilson."

He turned on his heel as if I had pushed a button somewhere on his broad body. "See you, Noon. Just forget the whole thing."

I caught up with him on the sidewalk and spun him around. He glared at me but I kept him collared.

"Do it my way," I said. "When Wheels hears me out, he'll lay off you. Otherwise you'll be trading in that horse blanket for a cement overcoat."

"He'll kill you too, Ed."

"No, he won't. You tell him what you had in mind and I'll tell him what I have in mind. He won't hold Greg Walters against you. I'll square that beef. Come on. What have you got to lose?"

"Only my life. That's what."

I flagged a passing taxi and propelled him toward it. He went, only because most of the fight had gone out of him. I guess he must have felt half-dead already. Small wonder. Wheels Wilson hadn't come by his reputation donating to charity or sending small boys to the country for two weeks.

Still, I was sure he would see things my way. The one thing the new breed of gangster hungers and yearns for is as little trouble as possible with the legal boys. I had a trump card I could play. Memo had one, too. I know he did. The trick was to get him to use it.

After all, when a guy has a million dollar memory, there must be something that he had remembered all too well.

Something about Wheels Wilson that was worth a hands-off policy and safety and security for life.

I was sure of it. Memo Morgan was eccentric but he wasn't loony, either.

Wheels Wilson's domain was the penthouse dream of all hoods everywhere. A blue-cheeked doorman was wating for us at a private elevator that let us off about fifteen floors above a swell, lonely view of the East River. The Queens shoreline was a sea of twinkling lights. Two other gunmen, sitting around in plush chairs, reading newspapers, got up and frisked us at the wide door.

They wore dress suits, said little and had expert hands. I wasn't packing any heat and Morgan was afraid of guns so we were clean. The whole scene was like something from a B gangster film of the thirties.

Beyond the door was a smooth, hard floor, glass windows, velour drapes and furniture and decor right out of a better class movie. The real stuff that dreams are made of was a statuesque redhead with green eyes whose lush contours were spilling out of a clinging silk dress that screamed of her importance to Wheels Wilson.

Wilson was sitting on a chaise lounge, smoking jacket and all.

The whole bit. His lean, hatchety face was unhappy, but the way his eyes swept over Memo and me, I knew he wasn't too worried. He had motioned to the redhead to remain where she was. Morgan was trying not to sweat but I could see that his insides were taking a beating.

Wheels Wilson wanted us standing; he didn't offer us a seat. The redhead stretched and her 38's plunged into view. I stared at Wheels Wilson.

"I don't like what you did to Greg Walters," Wilson said. His voice was dry ice, still smoking.

Memo Morgan cleared the frogs in his throat.

"You had me in a bind, Wheels. I had to talk to Noon here. I was scared. Greg looked like he was going to hurt me. So Noon took a hand."

"I did," I admitted. "And if you'll listen to reason, I'll tell you why."

Wilson's eyes glittered. A slow smile tugged at his mouth. He spoke over his shoulder, without looking at the redhead.

"Good looking guy, Rusty?"

"Not bad," she said, looking at her long fingers. "If you like them so damn cheerful-looking. I don't."

Wilson laughed. "You hear that, Mr. Noon? Rusty says you look happy. Morgan says you're a peacemaker. Well, I don't like happy people or peacemakers. Talk and make it good or you and Morgan will hold hands forever."

I shook my head.

"I don't know how you've lived so long, Wheels."

Memo sputtered. "Easy, Noon, don't make with the jokes—"

"Let him talk," Wheels snapped. "He's a game guy. That I do like."

The redhead was looking at me. So was Wheels. I had the floor. I shrugged and allowed the fool smile to spread over my face. The one that is baffling to those sort of people who can have you killed by pushing a button. They couldn't

understand people who didn't shake, shiver and roll when they made threats. But all I had bought was time.

"Go ahead," Wheels said. "I'm listening."

"Okay," I said. "You came to Memo Morgan with a proposition. I don't know what it is and I don't care. He couldn't do it. He couldn't tell you why, either. The point is, he still can't accept your offer. The other angle is he hasn't blown the whistle on you, he hasn't run out of town and he hasn't made a wrong move. So why don't you forget the whole thing?"

Wheels chuckled. "Is that all you have to sell?"

"No, the rest of it will frighten you. How do you feel about the F.B.I., the United States government and let's say all the special security officers in the world?"

That sat him up. He leaned forward from the chaise longue, his eyes targeted in on me. And Memo Morgan.

"Keep talking."

"You're not the only one who wants to use Memo's special services. The missile and rockets boys have asked him to help them on a special Cape Kennedy launching. They want him to memorize a panel board. I won't bore you with the details but Morgan here is working for the government, as of last week. You want to buck that, go ahead."

Memo Morgan lowered his head. "That's the ticket, Wheels. That's why I had to refuse you."

He glowered at Memo. "Why didn't you tell me that before and why did you ring up this private cop?"

"I didn't know what to do," Morgan rumbled. "I was boxed in. Noon's an old friend. I figured you'd believe it, coming from him."

The redhead yawned. "They're selling you soap, honey."

I jerked a thumb at her. "She do all your thinking for you?"

"You cheap—" The redhead called me an unlovely, unprintable name.

Wheels Wilson waved her off, his eyes blinking. He was thinking and thinking fast.

"All right, Noon. Say I buy your story, what's to keep me from unloading you two anyway, for a doublecross?"

"You'd be crazy. If you think I came up here without a gun and Morgan here because I'm Superman, you're way off base. Oh, I didn't leave any letters to policemen but I did make one phone call. You know Captain Monks? An old friend of mine. Old friend of yours too. He don't hear from me by three o'clock, your front door will get busted in. Oh, yes—all those government people will start raking you from top to bottom."

He wasn't listening to me anymore. He glared at Memo Morgan. He worked his tongue over his lower lip. The redhead had folded

her arms over her big breasts and was trying to look like a lady.

"You tell me, Memo," Wheels roared. "What's the real pitch here? I'll forget my original deal with you but I want to know where do we go from here?"

The man with the greatest memory in the world nodded slowly to himself and tried to smile. It didn't come off. He was still scared spitless. I couldn't blame him. Wheels Wilson's reputation was as ruthless as Hitler's.

"Noon's leveling. It's like he said. You know me, Wheels. I keep the code. Your business with me goes no further. Same with Ed here. Like I said, he's a pal. Can I put my hand in my right pocket? I want to show you something."

"Go ahead."

We all watched as Memo Morgan unearthed a folded square of paper from his side pocket and handed it across to Wheels. The big shot took it, fumbled it open and read rapidly. For one long moment, he cursed violently and then sagged against the chaise lounge. His eyes had glassed over. The redhead frowned but Wheels wasn't noticing. He handed the square of paper back to Memo.

"Go on," he said thickly. "Get out. Both of you. Walk away and keep your noses clean. Pretend we never met."

Memo Morgan needed no urging. I winked at the redhead, bowed mockingly, and walked to the door with Memo. Behind us, the redhead was muttering.

Wheels Wilson suddenly called out in a high, suspicious voice, "Memo!"

"Yeah, Wheels?"

"What is that *sigh-ber-ne-ticks?*"

Memo turned, surprised. "Cybernetics? That's the science of mechanico-electrical systems which solve complex mental computations and forecast the future. You interested? I could—"

"Get out," Wheels Wilson growled, defeated. "Don't come back."

We took the quiet elevator down, neither of us talking. It was late and quiet and there was that feeling of just having stepped down from the gallows. I felt a dryness in my throat. When we hit the street, we didn't call a cab. We began to walk, almost toward the lights of the city. Reprieves from death can make you feel like that.

"Noon, you are an ace. That government dodge was a corker. What made you think of it?" Wilson asked.

I laughed. "Can you think of anything else that scares the Wheels Wilsons of this world? I dressed it up a little, I admit, but he didn't have the intelligence to ask specific questions. Besides, the way you acted in Downey's, I knew you had an ace up your sleeve. And I don't mean me. Let's see the paper."

Under a friendly street light, I opened the square sheet of paper.

Another memo for Morgan. But this was a lulu.

To Whom It May Concern:

Memo Morgan, the bearer of this card, is associated with the Cybernetics Department of the United States and as such is entitled to the full protection of all agencies of law enforcement belonging to the United States.

Lyndon B. Johnson, President

"LBJ's got a nice signature," I said.

"Yeah. Even if it isn't his." Morgan held out his hand and took mine. "Thanks, Noon. You got Wilson off my back and I guess he'll keep Greg Walters away now too."

The lumpy face and the broken nose were placid for the first time that night. The man with the million dollar memory had been smart enough to dummy himself a card that would protect him from the gamblers and chiselers who would try to turn his talents to illegal channels.

"Sure, Memo. For old time's sake, who played Gary Cooper's commanding officer in 'Lives Of A Bengal Lancer'?"

He didn't even take a beat. "Sir Guy Standing. Now I got one for you."

His smile was almost a leer. "If a guy gets all-the-way drunk at midnight, what movie title does that suggest to you?"

"Too easy. Twelve O'clock High."

He laughed out loud and moved off into the night. I watched him until the horse blanket sports coat was swallowed up by the Manhattan darkness.

I made a mental memo to myself.

Cybernetics. I was going to look that one up myself.

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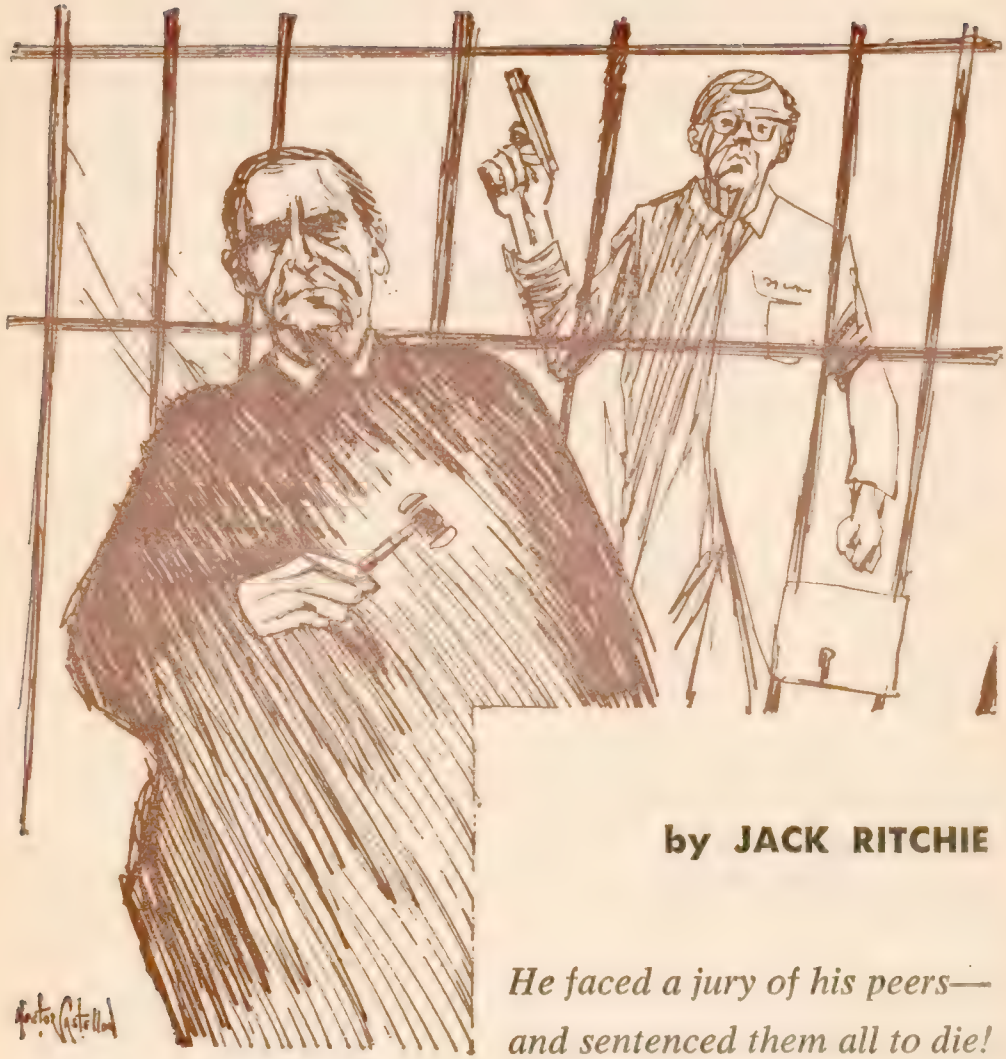

by JACK RITCHIE

He faced a jury of his peers—
and sentenced them all to die!

Speaking of Murder

HAVE YOU any statement to make before I pass sentence?" Judge Carson asked.

"I have," Daniel Webbley said. "I hereby declare that I intend to kill each and every member of the jury."

There was, of course, a collective gasp from the courtroom. I closed my eyes. When I opened them

again, I discovered that the alternate juror had turned pale.

He swallowed. "Am I included in that too, Mr. Webbley?"

Daniel ignored him and fixed his attention on the judge. "And naturally I am going to dispose of you also, Your Honor."

Carson banged his gavel until order was restored. He regarded Webbley with judicial severity. "Don't you realize that you can get into serious trouble if you go around making threats like that?" Then he frowned at me. "Counselor, haven't you any control over the defendant?"

I cleared my throat. "If you'll allow me a moment, sir, I'd like to speak to my client."

The judge nodded and I pulled at Webbley's sleeve until he sat down.

I whispered into his ear. "Why the hell did you have to say something like that now? Couldn't you at least have waited until after he sentenced you?"

"They don't allow you to make any statements after," Webbley said. "It was now or never."

"But you've got to apologize immediately or Judge Carson will undoubtedly give you the maximum sentence."

Webbley shrugged. "Even the minimum sentence will put me away for the rest of my days. I'm not exactly a spring chicken, you know."

There was a certain logic to that. But I said, "What about your chances for parole? How will something like this look in your records?"

He smiled patiently. "I won't be eligible for a parole for quite a few years to come. I am not waiting with bated breath."

On the bench, Judge Carson tapped his gavel once lightly. "Are you two about finished?"

Webbley stood up. "You may continue with the sentencing."

"Thank you," Carson said dryly. But he waited a few moments more and then frowned. "I thought I might hear an apology."

"No," Webbley said. "No apology."

Carson studied him. "I suppose you intend to escape from prison and put your threats into execution?"

"Perhaps."

"Only perhaps? But surely you have to be out of jail in order to carry out your little murders?"

"I would prefer it that way, of course," Daniel Webbley said. "However my presence is not at all necessary. I have already made arrangements with someone who is an expert in arranging—ah—accidents and natural deaths." He smiled widely and winked.

Carson rubbed the back of his neck. "Don't you think you received a fair trial?"

Webbley shrugged. "I have no complaints."

"Then why do you insist upon

murdering all these good people?"

"I have nothing against them personally," Webbley said. "It is simply that they represent society and society has rejected me."

Carson sighed. "Well, in that case, I might just as well get on with the sentencing."

Daniel Webbley received the maximum term the law provided.

I managed to talk to Webbley alone in an anteroom before he was to be taken away.

"We'll appeal," I said.

Webbley was faintly puzzled. "On what grounds? It seems to me that everything was absolutely proper."

"Never mind what grounds. A good lawyer can always make his own grounds." A thought came to me. "I might work on the prejudice theme. After you threatened his life, Carson couldn't have been entirely objective when he sentenced you."

Webbley patted my shoulder. "Now don't take all this too hard. I'm nearly sixty years old and I've spent close to thirty of those years behind bars. The winters are getting colder and longer outside and I almost feel like I'm going home. Most of my friends my age are in the big place now and they got light duty and regular meals and none of them are complaining too hard."

Webbley sighed. "You know, Ferguson, I haven't led too bad a life, all in all. Never harmed anybody."

"But unfortunately you steal."

He corrected me. "I embezzle. I concentrate upon greedy and soulless corporations."

"If you're so satisfied by the way things turned out," I said, "Why in the world did you have to threaten Carson and the jury? For the publicity? You have no intention of killing them, do you?"

Webbley had moved to the barred window. Now he stared intently downward. "Damn it," he snapped. "She never did learn how to handle that car."

I stepped beside him and looked down. A young lady with brilliant blonde hair seemed to be having trouble getting her convertible out of a street parking space. After a few bumper contacts, front and back, she finally managed to steer the car into traffic and drove off.

"Who was that?" I asked.

Webbley left the window. "You know, there's only one thing I really hate about prison. Stewed tomatoes. If someday you happen to see the Governor, could you get him to do something about that?"

IT WAS AN evening some six weeks later when Judge Carson approached me at the Lawyers' Club.

"Just read in the paper that McIntyre and Williams died," he said. "Airplane accident."

I searched my mind. "McIntyre? Is that the McIntyre of McIntyre, Schultz, and—"

Carson shook his head. "No. I

mean the McIntyre who served on the jury which convicted Daniel Webbley."

"Oh," I said. "That McIntyre." I thought further. "And that Williams?"

"Precisely."

"Oh," I said again and pulled on my pipe. "How did McIntyre and Williams both happen to be on the same plane?"

"It was McIntyre's private plane. He and Williams got acquainted while they were on jury duty and apparently hit it off. They were off across country on a hunting trip when the plane got caught in an unexpected and violent thunderstorm. Rammed into the side of a mountain and exploded."

"Hm," I said. "It exploded after it plowed into this mountain? Or before?"

"Nobody seems to know."

"But these aeronautics people who investigate these crashes are really clever about these things. Surely they can tell by an examination of the wreckage whether the explosion occurred before or after?"

"The airplane—and I might add, McIntyre and Williams too—was scattered over a considerable area. All of it snow covered."

"But when the snow melts—?"

"Up there the snow never melts."

I cleared my throat. "Have you brought this to the attention of the police?"

"Police?" He forced a laugh. "What would be the point of that? They might think I'm just a jittery judge long over-due for retirement."

"Quite right," I said. "The only thing to do is just sit and wait for further developments, if any."

Carson's voice became a bit testy. "That's easy for you to say. You weren't threatened." He pulled himself together. "Of course. Probably nothing to the whole thing. I'll sit and wait."

I changed the subject. "By the way, I hear that your class is having a reunion next week. I suppose you'll be flying out to the coast?"

"No," Carson said, "I'm taking the train."

Three months later, Carson appeared at my office at a little after nine-thirty in the morning.

"Have you read this morning's newspaper?" he asked.

I nodded. "The way things are going in Viet Nam—"

He shook his head impatiently. "I mean on page twenty-six, upper right hand corner." He lay a compactly folded section of the newspaper on my desk. The item he indicated had been encircled by pencil.

I read two sentences and then looked up. "Hennecker? Was he a member of the jury too?"

Carson nodded.

I continued reading. It seemed that last night had been Halloween and Hennecker had been walking

home from work, as was his custom, when a group of fiercely-costumed children had suddenly sprung from the darkness screeching terribly in an effort to frighten him.

They had succeeded.

Hennecker had fallen dead of a heart attack and the children had scattered and run off.

I looked up. "Just one of those things. It mentions that he had a history of heart trouble."

Judge Carson smiled without humor. "How do we know they were all children?"

I began to see the direction his mind was taking.

"Ah," I said, "You mean that one of them was a midget?"

He blinked. "Well, I was thinking that perhaps a small adult who knew about Hennecker's heart condition—" He rubbed his chin. "A midget? That is a possibility, of course."

I frowned. "Why haven't the police become suspicious on their own? Without prodding from us, I mean? Or the newspapers? Or even the members of the jury themselves?"

"In the first place, it's been some time since Webbley was sent to prison," Carson said. "In the second, all of these deaths are backpage, listed as accidental, one way or another. And in the third, I doubt very much whether the jury members now remember who else was on the panel, much less the newspapers or the police. I think Webbley's threat wasn't taken seriously by anybody and is now all but totally forgotten, never to be revived unless he should manage to escape."

I sighed. "What I can't understand is why did Webbley have to get up in a courtroom and publicly announce that he was going to kill a judge and a jury? If that was his intention, why couldn't he just have kept his mouth shut and quietly killed them all and no one the wiser?"

Carson brightened a bit as he was struck with an idea. "Why don't you go and see Webbley? Talk to him. Reason with him. Tell him to cease and desist."

"But we aren't absolutely certain that he's responsible for those deaths. Besides, I think it would be

more in order if you talked to Webbley. You have a more direct interest in this affair."

Carson shook his head. "He might possibly think of me as an enemy. But you are his friend, his defense counsel. I wish you would point out to him that it was the jury which found him guilty. I am simply an employee of the State and had to sentence him as a matter of course. No hard feelings intended."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'll tell him you don't care what happens to the jury, but—"

Carson glared at me. "Let me remind you that you will undoubtedly appear in my courtroom from time to time in the future. It might behoove you not to antagonize—"

"Yes, sir," I said, "I'll see Webbley right away."

At the state prison that afternoon, Warden Tassett arranged for me to see Webbley alone.

Webbley seemed of good color and cheer. "Well, hello, Mr. Fergusson. Nice to see you again."

I came directly to the point. "You do know about McIntyre, Williams, and Hennecker, don't you?"

He nodded. "Guess I do."

I paused to think. How did he know that McIntyre, Williams, and Hennecker were dead? According to Warden Tassett, Webbley had received no visitors or letters since he had been brought here. And no prisoner is allowed a newspaper. There was the prison radio, of course, but it broadcast only the patently important news. It would never stoop to an apparently insignificant item that might be found on page 26. Did Webbley have some direct contact with his hired assassin?

Perhaps Webbley read my mind. He smiled faintly. "I sweep out the guards' day room every morning. There are always newspapers around and I usually get a chance to read one or two."

"Ah," I said. "So you were watching for those names to appear. That's practically an admission that you had something to do with the deaths."

He seemed a little curious. "Suppose I did admit that I had McIntyre, Williams, and Hennecker murdered? What would happen to me?"

"You would be tried for murder and found guilty."

He smiled again. "We don't have the death penalty in this state, do we?"

"Well—no."

"And so then what could happen to me?"

I began to see his point. "You'd be sent to jail."

He clicked his tongue. "That bad, huh?"

I flushed. "Now see here, you just can't go about directing murder from this place . . ."

"Why not?"

A sudden lightning thought descended upon me.

I said triumphantly, "I see through the entire thing."

"You do?"

"Of course. This is your idea of a joke. In bad taste, but a joke nevertheless. You never had any intention of killing anybody at all."

"And how do you figure that?"

"It suddenly occurs to me that the jury was all male and rather elderly."

"Is that so?"

"And Judge Carson, though spry, is in his seventies."

"He doesn't look a day over sixty."

"And you are aware that the average life span of the American male is at present approximately seventy years."

"So?"

"So the chances were pretty good that Carson and/or some of the jurors were going to pass on during the next few years." I was elated. "By George, I should have thought of it before. The jury commences to die naturally or accidentally and you take the credit. And furthermore you throw those still surviving into a state of anxiety and fear."

He sighed. "So now you know everything?"

"Of course," I said. "I have an analytical mind. And besides, you didn't have any money."

"I didn't?"

"No," I said happily. "The court appointed me your attorney because you claimed to be destitute."

"Come to think of it, I did, didn't I?"

"Certainly. And so if you had arranged with some people to murder for you, you would certainly have had to have money to hire them."

"Of course I would have had to," he said admiringly. "Fine deductive thinking."

"Thank you," I said. "Hired killers cost money. I doubt very much if a friend might do the murders for you."

"Not even a good friend?"

"Well, possibly a good friend might murder one or two people. But thirteen?" I laughed. "Come now, let's be reasonable. Even a close relative would kill no more than three or four."

"How right you are," he said. "You have an absolutely keen mind. Brilliant."

I smiled for a few moments, but then upon reflection, I stopped. He was pouring it on too thick.

In Warden Tassett's office, I asked access to the information in Webbley's file.

Tassett extracted the bulky contents from the boxed file. "Webbley has spent quite a bit of time with us. Always with good behavior, though." He glanced at a sheet. "First time he came here was forty years ago. According to his admission sheet, he was reared in an orphanage. No known relatives."

I was a bit disappointed. "Well, that takes care of that."

Tassett hummed his way through a section of the stack of records. "Ah, what do we have here? It seems that when Webbley returned to us for the fourth time fourteen years later, he had a wife and a six-month-old daughter." Tassett turned a page. "Webbley's wife died three months later."

"What happened to the daughter?"

"There seems to be quite a bit of correspondence here about that—the gist of which is that since Webbley was at the beginning of a seven-year stretch, he obviously was in no position to take care of her. He had her put up for adoption. Her name was Diana Charlotte Webbley."

"Ah," I said. "Who adopted her?"

"Doesn't say here. Except that the whole thing was handled through the Whitman Foundation."

"What's Diana's description?"

Tassett consulted a sheet. "She weighed seventeen pounds, three ounces. Length, thirty inches."

"Never mind that," I said. "She's probably changed by now."

Tassett agreed. "But her eyes were blue. Maybe that'll help."

When I returned to Judge Carson, I passed on my information and my speculations.

He frowned. "That girl you mentioned who had trouble unparking her convertible. Were her eyes blue?"

"I was much too far away to see, but she did have blonde hair and so I imagine it's a good bet they were. Should we take what information we have to the police?"

Carson rubbed his neck. "The devil of the thing is that we still have no concrete evidence that Webbley is behind the deaths of McIntyre, Williams, and Hennecker. Why don't you go over to this Whitman Foundation and pursue the next logical step?"

I found the Whitman Foundation on the east side. It was housed in a rather tired brick building. The cornerstone indicated that the physical structure, at least, had been initiated in 1896.

Inside I was channeled up some well-worn wooden stairs to the office of a Miss Theodora Parker, who appeared to be the pinnacle of the small administrative pyramid. She was dark-haired, dark-eyed, and in her early thirties.

"Miss Parker," I said, "I'm looking for the whereabouts of an adoption handled by your agency in nineteen thirty-eight. The child's name was Diana Charlotte Webbley."

Theodora Parker smiled firmly and negatively. "I'm sorry, but our foundation is not allowed to release any information whatsoever regarding adoptions. We are dedicated to silence. There is no power on earth that can move us from this established policy."

"How about a court order?" I asked.

She regarded me coldly. "That is different, I suppose. Do you have one?"

"No, but I can get one."

She smiled again. "Please do."

I stared aggressively into those dark eyes for about fifteen seconds and then retreated. "Let me put it this way, Miss Parker. Why not eliminate all the red tape? Why don't you just phone Judge Alonzo Carson and ask him if he can get a court order? If he is forced to, I am sure he will."

Theodora Parker folded her hands. "He will be forced to. A mere telephone conversation is not sufficient authorization."

She remained quite adamant and since it was late in the afternoon, there was nothing for me to do but wait until the next morning, when I reappeared with the necessary court order.

Theodora Parker studied the paper. "Just why do you want to see the Webbley adoption papers?"

"Doesn't it say so on the court order?"

"No."

Today it was my turn to smile. I did—and said nothing.

She flushed slightly, but sent her secretary to the vault. When the file was put on her desk and opened, she raised an impressed eyebrow. "Diana Charlotte Webbley was adopted by the James T. Fellenbergs. Of the Fellenberg Breweries, you know."

I whistled. "Good Heavens, they're as wealthy as beer barons."

I pondered the information. I knew the Fellenberg family. Not intimately, of course, but two or three times a year our peripheries touched momentarily at the common ground of some civic-charity dinner. Diana—or Loretta, as the Fellenbergs called their only child—was now a happily married young matron with two children of her own. Not only that, but she had married Terrence McHugh, our new senator.

Could Loretta be responsible for the deaths of McIntyre, Williams, and Hennecker? Well, for one thing, she wasn't a blonde, though I suppose that one could dye one's hair on occasion. More important was the fact that I knew that she did not know how to drive a car. Not at all.

That afternoon I went to see Webbley again.

"Webbley," I said sternly, "We have your natural-born daughter, Helga-Marie Antoinette Barbarosa, under lock and key charged with first degree murder. On three counts."

He blinked. "Helga-Marie Antoinette Barbarosa?"

I nodded. "Her seven children have been transferred to the county detention home. Ordinarily, I suppose the authorities would have left them with her husband, Ludwig. Unfortunately Ludwig disappeared after the last child was born."

Webbley's mouth had opened slightly. "Seven?" Then he seemed to recover. "Now look here, Fergusson, Helga-Marie had absolutely nothing to do with those deaths. They were entirely natural or accidental. I was merely depending upon the natural attrition of time to create the impression of murder in order to—" He stopped.

I finished the context of the sentence for him. "In order to find your daughter?"

He smiled faintly and decided to make a few admissions. "When I was paroled back in nineteen forty-three, I tried to find my daughter, but I ran up against an official stone wall. It wasn't until recently, at the trial, that it suddenly came to me that there was one way I could find her." The faint smile widened.

"Suppose that I arranged things so that she was suspected of murder? Especially mass murder? Then wouldn't the police tear down all the secrecy to discover who and where she was?"

"You were willing to have her arrested by the police? Possibly sent to prison?"

He waved that aside. "She would have been in absolutely no danger of going to jail. There is no proof that anyone was murdered, much less that she could be responsible. The police would have just questioned her and revealed her identity."

"But why, after all these years, did you suddenly decide you wanted to see her again?"

He shrugged. "Here I was at the end of the road and I was just—well, curious."

"Oh? Just curious?"

"Of course."

I shook my head. "Webbley, you do not strike me as a thoughtless man. And so as a thoughtful one, surely you must have realized what you would be doing to her. Suppose her adoptive parents had never told her that she was not their own child? Discovering that could be quite a shock. And how would she feel upon learning that her real father is an embezzler who has been put into prison for the rest of his days?"

He hung his head, but not too convincingly.

"I guess I was just thoughtless after all."

"No, Webbley," I said. "I believe that you did think of these things. But you decided that she would forgive you anyway. And I can think of only one reason why you could expect her to. And that reason is money."

Webbley's eyes formed a protective blank. "I don't know what you mean."

"You lied to the court," I said. "You are not destitute."

Webbley said nothing.

"Webbley," I said, "Your lost daughter's name is not Helga-Marie Antoinette Barbarosa."

That cornered his attention im-

mediately. "No? Then what is it?"

"I won't tell you."

After a few ruminative moments, he glared. "But you do know who my daughter is? Or do you?"

"I do. However I think that you'd be doing her more harm than good by letting the world know that you're her father."

He struggled with new thoughts for half a minute and then seemed to come to a decision. "Who else besides you knows who she is?"

"Nobody, actually. I'm the only person who knows the connection between her and a Webbley who happens to be in prison."

"Not the police?"

"No."

He sighed. "Maybe it's better this way, after all. I don't want to cause her any trouble if I can help it. I just want her to have the money. She doesn't need to know that I exist."

He studied me. "You were right, Fergusson. It's money and a lot of it. I was never one of the big spenders and so it accumulated through the years. I want you to see that she gets it, but I don't want her to know it's from me. Invent an uncle or some lost stocks or something. I'll leave the details up to you. You get ten percent for handling it."

"Ten percent of what?"

"Three hundred thousand dollars."

I was impressed.

"You're the only person outside the walls I trust," Webbley said.

"Thank you. Do you want to leave any part of the money to that blonde who 'never did learn how to handle a car?' "

He grinned. "Never saw her before in my life. I just wanted to plant a little memory in your mind and get it pointed in the right direction."

Webbley gave me directions for finding a safety deposit box key he had concealed in the basement of an apartment building. I retrieved it, went to the bank, and opened the box which contained three hundred thousand dollars.

It was an impressive amount of money. Even for a Fellenberg, I thought. But did it really belong to Diana-Loretta?

Did it actually belong to anybody?

I stared at it for a long time. I perspired a bit.

And then I transferred it to my own safety deposit box.

I went back to Judge Carson and told him what I wanted him to know. I did not tell him about the money.

He digested my information. "So all Carson was really trying to do was scare us to death? Nothing more?"

"Nothing more," I said. "He had no other motive."

The judge seemed satisfied. "I don't suppose there's any point then in exposing the fact that Lo-

retta Fellenberg is really Diana Webbley?"

"None at all."

It was April when I once again stopped at the excavation next to the Whitman Foundation and watched the work which was in progress.

The men seemed busy, except for one rather loutish fellow who lounged about directly below me. I had been keeping my eye on him for some days now.

I felt impelled to speak.

"My dear sir," I said. "If you are simply a spectator, perhaps you would care to join me up here and we can both do the watching."

He scowled. "What's the matter, mister? You paying for this job?"

I felt inclined to tell him. Very strongly inclined. But my three hundred thousand dollar gift to the Whitman Foundation Building Fund would have to remain anonymous.

I remained where I was for six minutes more and then at precisely five eleven, happened to be passing the front door of the old Whitman Foundation building just as Theodora Parker exited.

I tipped my hat. "My, what a coincidence."

And so we went to dinner once again.

Complete in the Next Issue

THE HOARY GAMBIT

A New Dramatic Novelet

by ROBERT W. ALEXANDER

It was a house of hate and evil, and Murder was an unseen, unwelcome guest. Soon, before dawn, he must be trapped, or another would die hard in the night.

MR. WONG and the CLUMSY WAITER

It was indeed a macabre bill of fare. The entree, raw hatred–The dessert—trackless murder without a motive . . .

by DAN ROSS

MEI WONG glanced up from the fan painting of a landscape by the seventeenth century artist Yun Nan-t'ien, which he had

spread out before him on his desk, and told Inspector Bannerjee, "This is one of the rarest examples of ancient art. Look at it! What a wonderful tangle of trees! Pines, I think. See how gracefully the wreaths of mist float among their tops!"

Inspector Bannerjee glanced impatiently over the elderly Chinaman's shoulder and observed dryly, "Very interesting!" Then he marched around to the front of the desk. "I don't want to low grade one of your art treasures, Wong. But I am here on important business."

Mei Wong sat back in his chair and smiled, an overnight Buddha in a white linen suit. He waved a pudgy hand to indicate the interior of his lavish studio on the fifth floor of Bombay's Empire Hotel.

"The things in this room are all that is important to me," he said pleasantly. "It is to these items of brass, porcelain and china that I have devoted my life."

Inspector Bannerjee glared around the treasure-filled studio. "I grant all that, Mei Wong," he said, "But surely you regard the death of a friend important."

Mei Wong's broad face became grave. "What friend?"

"Matthew Dalton. He died in his hotel here last night," the inspector said. "He arrived by boat from Hong Kong yesterday morning. His daughter had a cocktail party for him in her apartment here last night. Weren't you among the guests?"

The art dealer nodded. "Yes, I was there. Matthew Dalton was one of my best clients. I am sorry to hear of his death."

"They're doing an autopsy on him now," Inspector Bannerjee said. "As you know, the ship he came in on passed through a typhoon on the way here. Dalton fell down a gangway. The theory is his death was due to delayed results of the injury."

Mei Wong's eyes narrowed. "Possible," he said. "Matthew Dalton always had rather poor health although he was a tall, heavily-built man. He suffered from recurrent bouts of malaria."

Inspector Bannerjee appeared disinterested. "Really?"

Mei Wong continued. "He was not in the best of spirits last night. Perhaps he was feeling ill then. I felt it might be because he was worried about his daughter's approaching marriage to young William Evans."

"Did you talk with Dalton last night?"

The art dealer shook his head. "You know how it is at cocktail parties. There were perhaps a hundred people there. But I did speak with Grace, his daughter, and I know she was concerned about the bad feeling between her father and Evans."

The inspector shrugged. "I can understand his attitude. If I were a

multi-millionaire with an only daughter I doubt if I'd want her to marry a man expelled from the leading club in Bombay for cheating at cards."

A strange look suddenly crossed the old art dealer's face. He glanced at the inspector. "Do you think the results of the autopsy are known yet?"

"I suppose so," Bannerjee said looking at Wong curiously. "Would you like me to call?"

Mei Wong waved a pudgy hand towards the phone at his elbow. "Please do."

The inspector made the call and after a few minutes conversation put down the receiver and turned to the art dealer with a satisfied look on his bearded, swarthy features. "A result of his shipboard fall, as I expected. He must have hit his spleen and ruptured it. A slow internal hemorrhage finished him after he returned to his hotel last night."

The stout old Chinaman shook his head stubbornly. "I do not like to argue a point with you, Inspector. But Matthew Dalton did not die a natural death. He was murdered."

The inspector's voice rose sharply, "Murdered!"

Mei Wong nodded. "Murdered —in the presence of more than a hundred guests gathered in his honor."

Inspector Bannerjee gave him an incredulous look. "That's a weird,

and if you'll pardon me, a rather impossible statement."

The old art dealer shook his head and got up and came around to stand facing the inspector. "On the contrary. With a little luck I can prove my case. At the party last evening we had an extremely clumsy waiter. There were two rather odd happenings."

The inspector's eyebrows raised. "What sort of happenings?"

"I would like you to meet a friend of mine, who lives on the eighth floor of this hotel," Mei Wong said. "He is also an American like Matthew Dalton, and about the same age and build. He is interested in ancient porcelain. You must meet him. I'll see if he's in."

As Mei Wong padded to the phone the inspector protested, "Really, Mr. Wong, I find your statements disjointed. What has this friend of yours to do with Matthew Dalton being murdered?"

But Mei Wong was already talk-

ing on the phone. When he finished he told the inspector, "It's all right. We can now go up and see my friend, George Hastings."

Somewhat grumpily the inspector followed him. They took the elevator to the eighth floor and George Hasting's expensive suite. The American was a bluff white-haired man of heavy build. After Mei Wong had made introductions Hastings invited him and Bannerjee to sit down.

The big man frowned. "I'm still not feeling too good after last night," he said.

Mei Wong glanced at the inspector and then asked George Hastings, "For Inspector Bannerjee's benefit, would you mind repeating what happened?"

"Makes me rage just to think of it," George Hastings fumed, as he patted his left side tenderly. "Grace Dalton had some dreadful-looking creature serving and he bumped into me. Clumsy ape! Luckily he didn't spill the tray, but he managed to give me a bruise on my side that's still hurting!"

Inspector Bannerjee leaned forward in his chair. "He bruised your side?"

Hastings nodded. "Some stupid native fellow. And as if that wasn't bad enough, only a few minutes later he bumped into Matthew Dalton in the same way. I can't understand why Grace would hire such an incompetent fellow."

Mei Wong nodded. "I'm sure there must be an excellent explanation."

A few minutes later Wong and Bannerjee excused themselves. In the elevator going down the art dealer asked the inspector, "Did you notice anything strange about George Hastings?"

"Nothing," Bannerjee said, "except he looks remarkably like Matthew Dalton."

Wong seemed pleased at his answer. "You are quite right," he agreed. "Now we will go and have a short talk with Grace Dalton, the daughter of the murdered man."

Inspector Bannerjee looked at him bleakly. "I still don't see why you insist there was a murder."

"Wait and you will see."

Grace Dalton had an apartment in one of the big yellow stucco building overlooking the bay in a choice residential area. They waited some minutes to see her and when she came into the room her fragile blonde beauty was marred by the tragedy written on her face and signs of recent weeping.

Mei Wong spoke gently. "We regret the intrusion at this moment of sorrow. But the inspector is curious about a native servant you employed for the cocktail party. An ugly looking fellow. Clumsy too! He had several accidents."

Grace Dalton stared at him blankly for a moment. Then, remembering, she said, "Oh, I know who you mean. Abdul. He is Bill's personal servant."

The art dealer nodded. "Ah, I see. He works for William Evans, the young man you are planning to marry."

And then after a few more well chosen words he and the inspector left.

Inspector Bannerjee headed his official car along the broad highway that rimmed the bay and led to the district where William Evans lived in an expensive rented cottage. Mei Wong sat placidly beside him, his hands folded on his ample stomach.

Bannerjee said, "I take it we are now going to pay a visit on William Evans and his man Abdul."

"I think it will be worth our while, the art dealer said.

"You have still to make me see where murder is involved."

They drove through iron gates and into a gravel driveway to a secluded cottage half-hidden by palms. They both got out of the car and made for the front door.

On the way Mei Wong suggested, "It might be well to have your gun handy, Inspector."

The inspector stared at him in amazement. "You're not usually in such a violent mood."

"I fear Abdul may not be in a pleasant humor," Mei Wong said, ringing the bell.

His prediction proved right. The door was opened by an ugly little man who took one glance at Inspector Bannerjee and then fled

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In the Next Issue—

THE INNOCENT VICTIM

A Thrilling New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Wild, reckless had been her life; sudden and violent her murder. Could Mike Shayne break through a cordon of hate and track down the man who had killed his best friend?

---

down the hallway. The inspector pursued him with Mei Wong coming behind. Halfway down the hall the Indian turned and hurled a glittering knife at the inspector, who dodged its impact by bracing against a wall. At the same instant he raised his hand and shot at the fleeing Abdul.

The bullet brought the ugly little man to a halt. He lay in the rear hallway, clutching his leg and moaning. Inspector Bannerjee stood over him grimly, then turned to Mei Wong, who had just come up to join them.

"Why did he behave this way?" the inspector wanted to know.

"A guilty conscience," Mei Wong observed calmly. "He murdered Matthew Dalton on William Evan's orders."

Bannerjee kept the wounded man covered and at the same time gave the old art dealer a questioning look. "Please explain."

"Of course," Mei Wong said. "Abdul was sent to the party by Evans to act as a servant. Evans was anxious to get Matthew Dalton out of the way, since the millionaire was determined to break the marriage plans between him and his daughter."

"Mei Wong glanced at the man on the floor, "Abdul made an apparently clumsy servant but he was really being crafty. He did make one error. He mistook George Hastings for Dalton when he bumped into him. But he corrected this a few minutes later by running against Matthew Dalton in the same way."

Inspector Bannerjee was dubious. "He bumped into both men in the identical manner. One of them only suffered a bruise and injured feelings. The other one died a few hours later. If Abdul murdered one he should have murdered them both."

Mei Wong shook his head. "You are forgetting a most important point—the means of death. It is a known method among thugs in this country, to murder a man by striking him a deft blow under the left rib cage and rupturing his spleen.

"There is only one condition necessary. The man must already have a badly swollen spleen from bouts of Malaria. Matthew Dalton had such a spleen and Evans knew it when he set up the murder plot. Abdul gave both men vicious jabs with his fist under cover of the tray, but Hastings escaped death because his spleen was healthy. For Dalton it was sure death."

Inspector Bannerjee gave a deep sigh. "So we did have a murder," he said. "Now all we have to do is round up Evans."

"That should not be difficult," Mei Wong said mildly. "He had planned a nearly perfect crime. He will not run away."

(Continued from Other Side)

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